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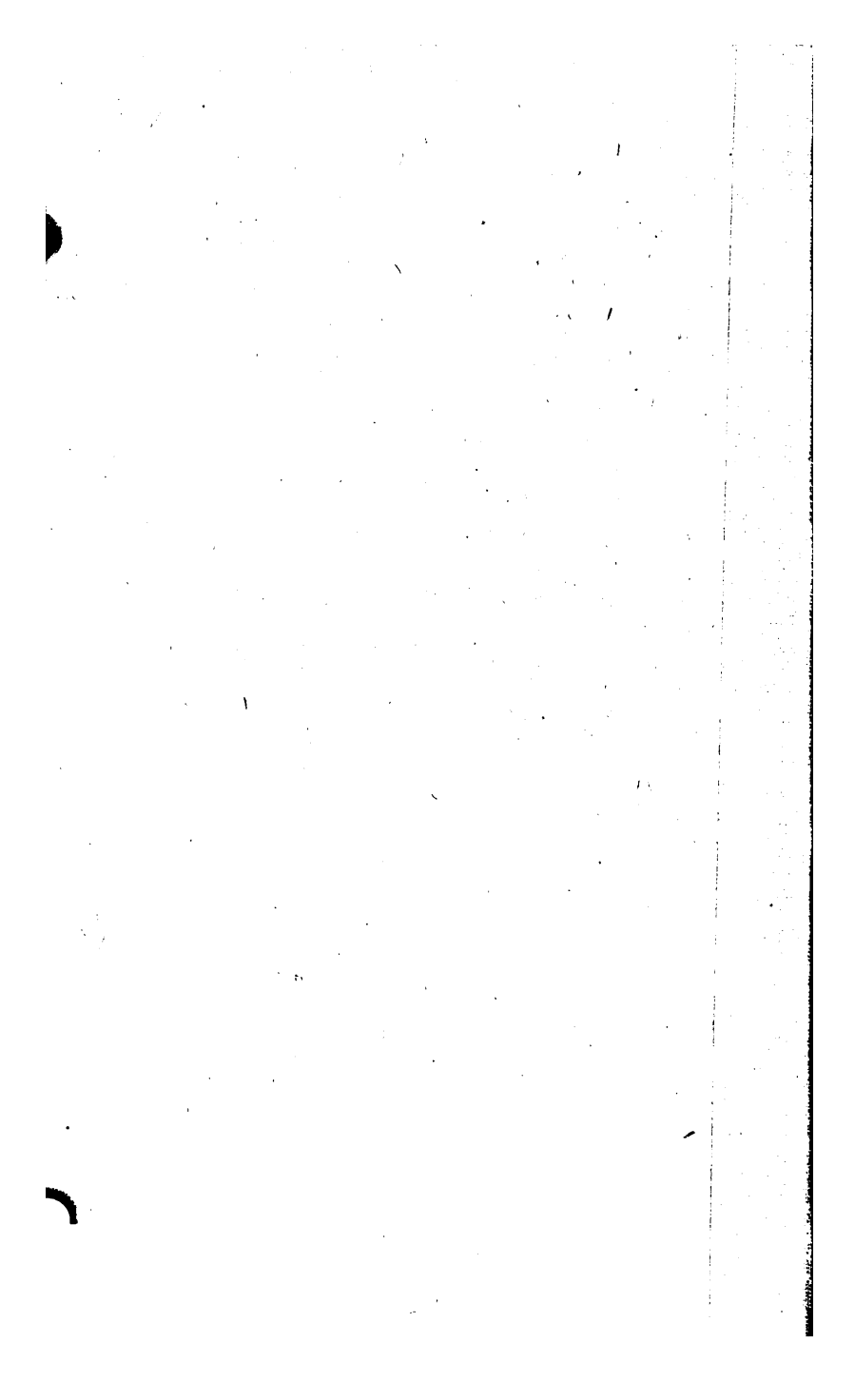
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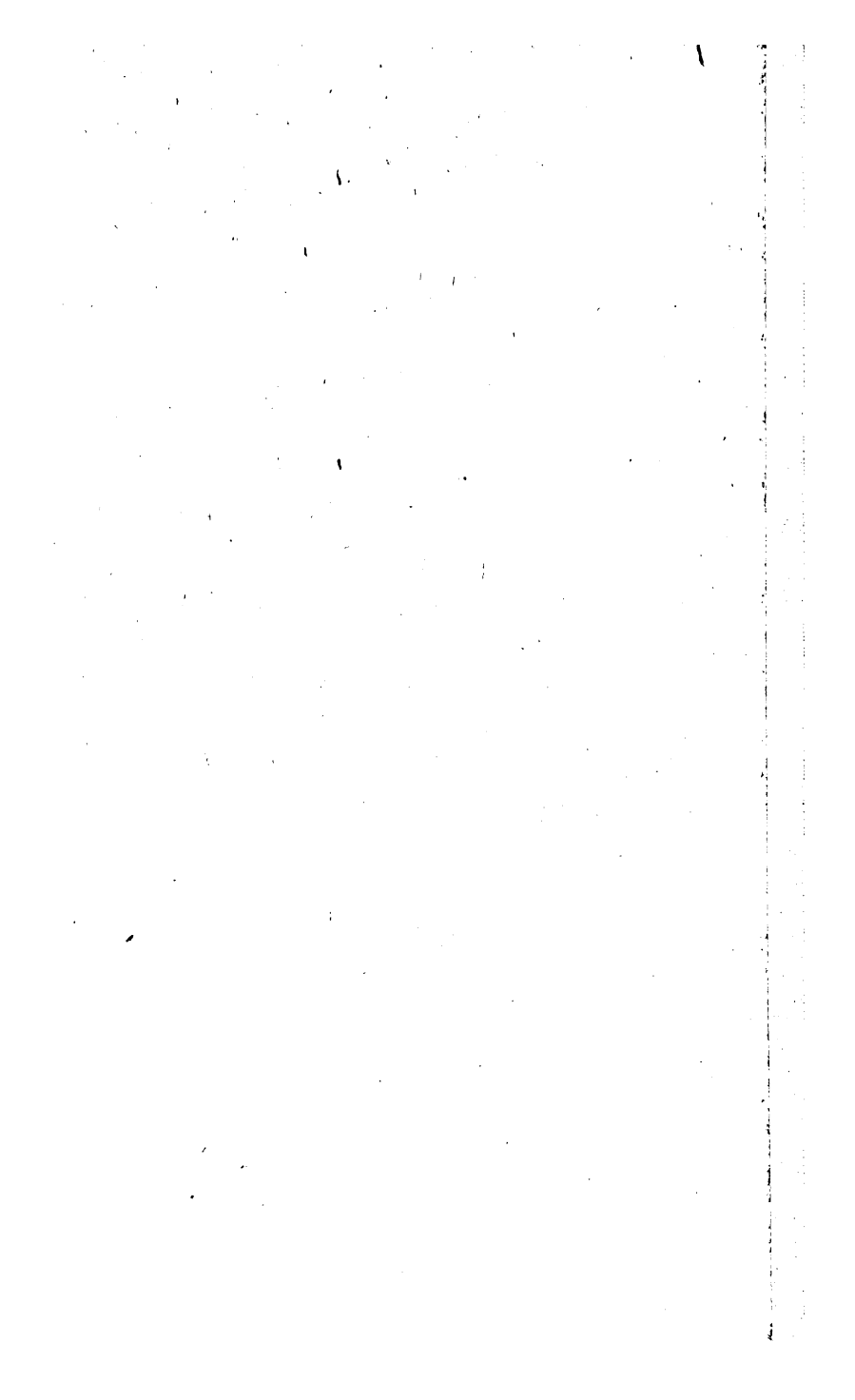
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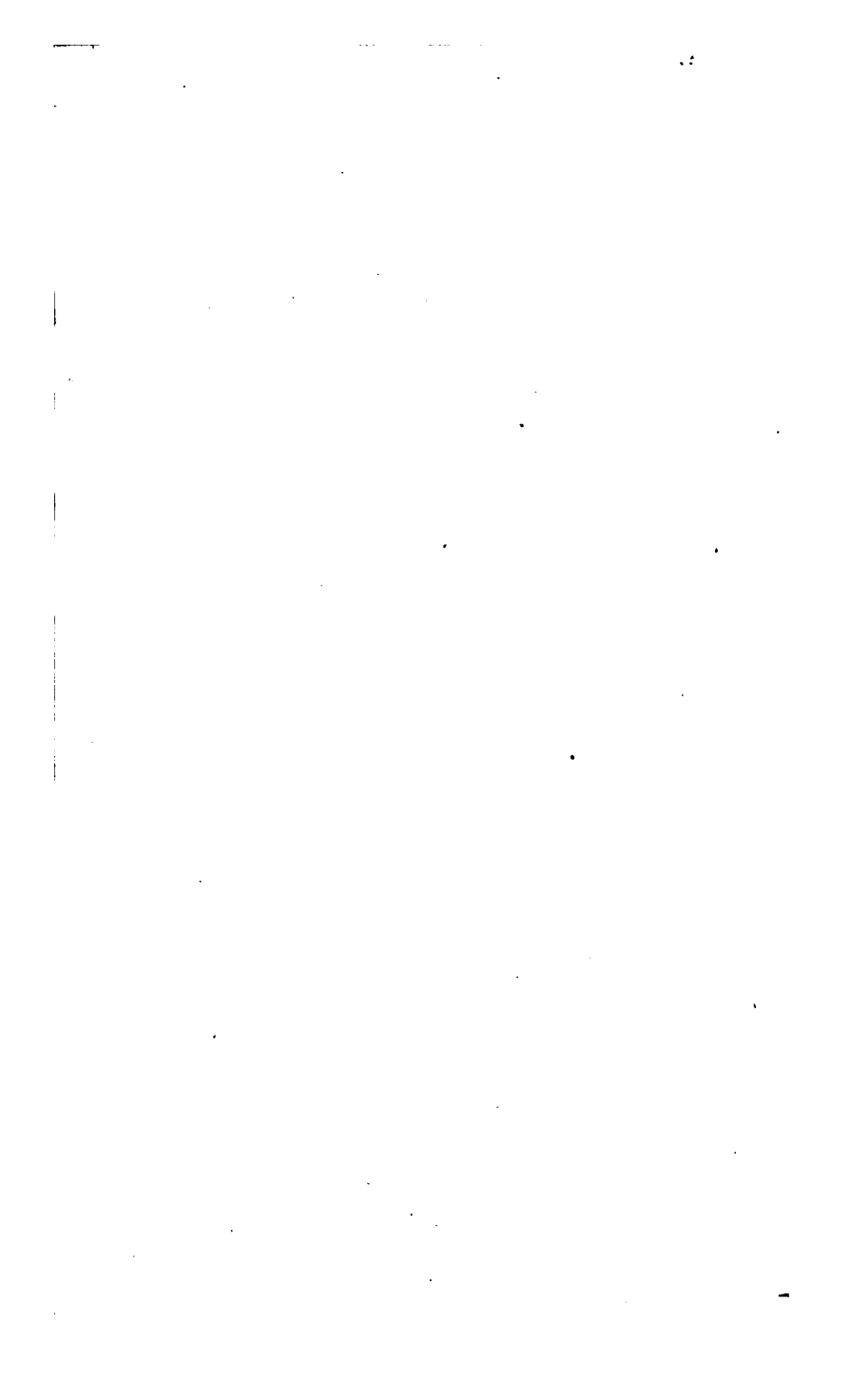
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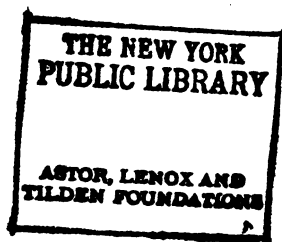
THE
L I F E
OF
WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

BY
ROBERT SOUTHEY, ESQ., LL. D.,
POET LAUREATE, ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LIFE OF COWPER.

CHAPTER XII.

SKETCHES OF THE PROGRESS OF ENGLISH POETRY FROM CHAUCER TO COWPER.

WHEN Dr. Burney, the elder, visited Ferney, in his travels, Voltaire inquired of him what poets we then had in England; and was answered, "We have Mason and Gray." "They write but little," he replied, "and you seem to have no one who lords it over the rest, like Dryden, Pope, and Swift." "I told him," says Burney, "it was perhaps one of the inconveniences of periodical journals, however well executed, that they often silenced modest men of genius, while impudent blockheads were impenetrable, and unable to feel the critic's scourge; that Mr. Gray and Mr. Mason had both been illiberally treated by mechanical critics, even in newspapers; and that modesty and love of quiet seemed in these gentlemen to have got the better even of their love of fame."¹

Voltaire, who lorded it himself over the literature of his own country, was but superficially acquainted with that of any other. Dryden may rather be said to have at one time deserved the supremacy, than ever by general consent to have possessed it; and it was not by his poetry that Swift attained the high station which he must ever hold among English writers. Pope was our first and only dictator. In specifying Gray and Mason as the most eminent

¹ Present State of Music in France and Italy, 1771.

of the then living poets, Dr. Burney spake the just opinion of his contemporaries ; but in ascribing so much power to periodical criticism, he was wrong both in the general remark, and in the particular application. Such criticism may do, and has done, much in assisting to corrupt the public taste ; but the fear of it never withheld any poet from publishing ; nor has its most determined enmity ever succeeded in crushing a poem that deserved to live, nor for any length of time in preventing it from making its way.

When that visit was paid, at Ferney, by a good man, to the apostle of licentiousness and impiety, Gray was planning and preparing for great works both in prose and verse ; and Mason, in the enjoyment of fair preferment properly bestowed, was amusing himself with anonymous satires, and proceeding leisurely with his didactic and later dramatic works. Before Cowper appeared in the field, Gray was dead, and Mason seemed to have retired from it. At any time the Task must have been successful, but at no time could the circumstances have been more favorable for its reception ; for the revival of that true English taste, which this poem mainly contributed to promote, had already been begun.

The revolution in our fine literature, which took place upon the Restoration, was as great as the political revolutions which preceded, and in their consequences produced it. There is no other example of so sudden a degradation, nor any of so great a one, except where it has coincided with the decay and downfall of a state. It was most apparent in the drama, a high department wherein the English had far excelled all modern nations. The last of that school of dramatists, to whom, far inferior as all, and especially the latter ones, were to their mighty master, no other language has produced any that are either like, or comparable, lived to see a French school introduced in the country of Shakspeare ; rhymed tragedies became the fashion of the age ; and, which is the worst system of depravation, men of great and indubitable genius took the lead in this and other perversions of the national taste. The blank verse of our old plays is so perfectly in accord with the genius of our language, and so excellently adapted to its purpose, that

no greater proof of degenerated taste has ever been given than in this attempt to supersede it by a fashion imported from France, with the French accompaniments of frippery, tinsel, and false sentiment.

During the great rebellion, when the theatres were closed and plays were contraband, such portions of old stock pieces as were most likely to please the populace were exhibited under the appellation of Drolls,² in taverns, in booths at fairs, or on mountebank stages. Yet it was not so derogatory to Shakspeare that the humors of Bottom the Weaver should thus be vulgarized, as that his noblest works should be accommodated to the temper of the times, not alone by authors who, whatever reputation they enjoyed, were botchers at the best, but by men who, when they committed this sacrilege, could not but be conscious that it was sacrilege they were committing. Shadwell boasted that he had made Timon of Athens into a play; the execution was worthy of the attempt, and the attempt was worthy of Shadwell, whose bust in Westminster Abbey ought to have been cast either in lead or in brass, or in an emblematic amalgama of the two metals. Nahum Tate, who of all my predecessors must have ranked lowest of the laureates, — if he had not succeeded Shadwell, — adapted Coriolanus, Richard the Second, and King Lear, to his own notions of dramatic propriety. Shadwell could not degrade himself, for nothing could degrade him; and poor Nahum, whom Dryden invited to assist him in his Absalom and Achitophel, and who was one of the duumvirate appointed to “fit the Psalms to the tunes used in churches,” may be excused for fancying that he could fit Shakspeare’s tragedies to the stage. But how can we

² “When the publique theatres were shut up, and the actors forbidden to present us with any of their tragedies because we had enough of that in earnest, and comedies, because the vices of the age were too lively and smartly represented, then all that we could divert ourselves with were these humors, and pieces of plays, which passing under the name of a merry conceited fellow, called Bottom the Weaver, Simpleton the Smith, John Swabblers, or some such title, were only allowed us, and that but by stealth, and under pretence of rope-dancing, or the like.” — *Francis Kirkman’s Preface to the Wits, or Sport upon Sport*, being a curious collection of several Drolls and Farces, &c. 1673.

explain or excuse the obliquity of taste and obtuseness of feeling in Dryden, and in Davenant, (a poet of a higher grade,) when they joined in interpolating the *Tempest* with their own base inventions?

The change which took place in the drama was in all respects for the worse; in other kinds of poetry it was not at first so entirely bad; yet there was a rapid decline. Imagination and fancy had already been displaced by conceit and wit; and these in their turn were lowered, till at length the poverty of thought was upon a level with the meagreness of expression. Here Dryden, though the chief of those who debased the drama, is the great and almost the only exception, for Cowley and Butler, as well as Milton, belong to the preceding generation.

It was at one time a received opinion, and Johnson gave it the sanction of his great authority, that Waller and Denham began to refine our versification, and that Dryden perfected it. Before the time of Dryden, he says, there was "no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts." "The new versification, as it was called, may be considered," he says, "as owing its establishment to Dryden, from whose time it is apparent that English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness." "The veneration with which his name is pronounced by every cultivator of English literature, is paid to him, as he refined the language, improved the sentiments, and tuned the numbers of English poetry." "To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, — and much of the correctness of our sentiments." But there was no subject of which Johnson, if he knew any thing, knew so little as of our early poetry. The poets before the Restoration were to him what the world before the flood is to historians. He has, however, incidentally observed, that the Elizabethan poets "had attained an art of modulation which was afterwards neglected or forgotten."

Our versification, which was exceedingly complicated in the first ages of our poetry, appears to have been of home growth. We neither inherited nor borrowed any thing from

the Welsh, whose system of metre is more intricate than that of any other people. From our Saxon ancestors a scheme of alliterative verse was retained, which became obsolete almost as soon as *Piers Ploughman's Visions* (one of the most remarkable works in the language) had been composed in it. The extravagant fashion of the Scalds, who strung mythological metaphors into a sort of language which was one continued riddle, had no imitators here; nor has it had any parallel in European literature, except in the short-lived style which Gongora introduced among the Spaniards. But with what care the vernacular poetry was cultivated as an art may be seen in the *Metrical Romances*, in many of which the stanzas are very graceful, and in others not less curiously elaborate. The first reformation which it underwent was to free it from some gratuitous difficulties, and divest it of the cumbrous ornaments with which it had been overloaded. Chaucer, who is deservedly accounted the Father of English Poetry, effected this. The line of English poets begins with him, as that of English kings with William the Conqueror; and if the change introduced by him was not so great, his title is better. Kings there were before the conquest, and of great and glorious memory too; but the poets before Chaucer are like the heroes before Agamemnon; even of those whose works have escaped oblivion, the names of most have perished.

Father Chaucer, throwing off all trammels, simplified our verse. Nature had given him the ear, and the eye, and the imagination of a poet; and his diction was such as that of all great poets has ever been, and ever will be, in all countries, — neither cramped by pedantic rules, nor vitiated by prevailing fashions, nor raised on stilts, nor drooping for want of strength, but rising and falling with the subject, and always suited to it.

The seven-lined stanza of his *Troilus and Cresseide* ³

³ Sydney seems to have considered this as his greatest poem. "Chaucer," he says, "undoubtedly did excellently in his *Troilus and Cresseide*, of whom truly I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we, in this clear age, go so stumbly after him." — *Defence of Poesy*.

was adopted from the Provençal poets. I know not whether he had any example of the ten-syllable couplet in the poets of France, Provence, and Italy, but the Hermit of Hampole, Richard Rolle, who perhaps himself followed others, had shown him the way in this. That the one form of verse was, in his judgment, as well fitted for grave and lofty subjects as the other, is certain, for in such subjects he has employed them both; but it appears that the couplet took its character in common opinion from his lighter pieces, and was supposed to be adapted for nothing better. And while the "Troilus verse," as King James called it, obtained the dignified title of Rhythm Royal,⁴ the strain in which the knight related his tale of Palamon and Arcite, and in which "the story of Cambuscan bold" had been pitched, was degraded in public estimation, and distinguished by the contemptuous term of *riding rhymes*.⁵

It is a disputed question whether Chaucer's verses be

⁴ "His metre heroical of Troilus and Cresseid is very grave and stately, keeping the staff of seven and the verse of ten: his other verses of the Canterbury Tales be but riding rhyme, nevertheless very well becoming the matter of that pleasant pilgrimage, in which every man's part is played with much decency." — *Puttenham, Art of English Poesy*, p. 50.

"I had forgotten a notable kind of rhyme called riding rhyme, and that is such as our master and father, Chaucer, used in his Canterbury Tales, and in divers other delectable and light enterprises. As this riding rhyme serveth most aptly to write a merry tale, so rithme royal is fittest for a grave discourse." — *Gascoigne's Instructor*, p. 12.

Rithme royal is the seven-lined stanza of Troilus and Creseide. Gascoigne describes it as "a verse of ten syllables, and seven such verses make a staff, whereof the first and third lines do answer, across, in like termination and rhyme; the second, fourth, and fifth do likewise answer each other in terminations; and the two last do combine and shut up the sentence: this hath been called rithme royal, and surely it is a royal kind of verse, serving best for grave discourses." — *Ib.* p. 10.

James I. in his *Reulis and cautelis* to be observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie, says this stanza is called Troilus verse, and that it is to be used "for tragical materis, complaintis, or testamentis."

⁵ Perhaps Shakspeare alludes to this appellation when he describes a still more familiar kind of measure, as the "right butterwoman's rate to market." *Sermo pedestris* is an expression analogous to *riding rhyme*.

James I. speaks of the ten-syllable couplet as an inferior strain, not to be compared with any kind of stanza, — "ryme," he calls it, "quhilk servis onely for lang historeis, and zit are nocht verse."

rhythmical or metrical. I believe them to have been written ⁶ rhythmically, upon the same principle on which Coleridge composed his beautiful fragment of Christabel, — that the number of *beats*, or accentuated syllables in every line, should be the same, although the number of syllables themselves might vary. Verse so composed will often be strictly metrical; and because Chaucer's is frequently so, the argument has been raised that it is always so if it be read properly, according to the intention of the author. But to suppose that it was written as iambic verse, and that the lines were lengthened or shortened to the required measure by sometimes pronouncing a final syllable, and sometimes letting it remain mute, according to the occasion, is supposing that Chaucer took greater liberties with the common pronunciation, (which must always be uniform,) and relied more on the judgment of the reader, than one who so perfectly understood the character of his mother tongue, and was so well acquainted with the ordinary capacities of men, can be supposed to have done, without impeachment of his sagacity. Be this as it may, it is no slight proof of that sagacity, that he should have

⁶ For this opinion, which was earnestly impugned by my old school-fellow, James Boswell the younger, and in which I am supported by Farmer and Dr. Nott, (who, I think, has fully established it,) there is the explicit testimony of George Gascoigne, in his Instruction concerning the making of verse in English. He says, "Commonly nowadays in English rhymes, (for I dare not call them English verses,) we use none other order but a foot of two syllables, whereof the first is depressed or made short, and the second is elevated or made long; and that sound or scanning continueth throughout the verse. We have used in times past other kinds of metres. — Also our father Chaucer hath used the same liberty in feet and measures that the Latinists do use; and whosoever do peruse and well consider his works, he shall find that although his lines are not always of one self-same number of syllables, yet being read by one that hath understanding, the longest verse, and that which hath most syllables in it, will fall to the ear correspondent with that which hath fewest syllables in it; and likewise that which hath in it fewest syllables shall be found yet to consist of words that have such natural sound as may seem equal in length to a verse which hath many more syllables of lighter accents. And surely I can lament that we are fallen into such a plain and simple measure of writing, that there is none other foot used but one; whereby our poems may justly be called rithms, and cannot by any right challenge the name of a verse. But since it is so, let us take the good as we find it." — Pp. 5, 6.

pitched the key and determined the length of verse, which, after so many experiments, and the lapse of nearly five centuries, have been found to accord best with the genius of the language; and that his "riding rhyme," under the more dignified denomination of the "heroic couplet," should be the measure which Dryden and Pope and their followers have preferred to all others for grave and lofty subjects.

The "ornate style," which is the worst fashion that has ever been introduced into English verse, began in Chaucer's time, and he adopted it in some of his smaller and later pieces; perhaps as an experiment towards the improvement of a language then in a state in which experiments might allowably be tried—perhaps to gratify some of his friends who admired the new mode: but unless his faculties were impaired by age, of which there is no proof or indication, it is not possible that he could have approved of it himself. His language was what he had learned in the country, in the city, and in the court; what every one could understand, and every one could feel; it was the language of passion and of real life, and therefore the language of poetry: the ornate style was the language of the cloister; it was what any "Latiner" could be taught to write mechanically, without the slightest apprehension that any thing more than versification was required to constitute poetry, and even without ear for that. It was equally pedantic and antipoetical. For more than a century our poetry was overlaid with it. The age after Chaucer was in many respects darker than that which preceded it; his name, however, was held in reverence, and succeeding poets were instructed to look to him as their exemplar, even by those who departed from him most widely in their own practice.

The ornate fashion was suppressed with the monasteries in which it originated; and a new impulse was given to this branch of literature when Surrey introduced into it the forms as well as the character of Italian poetry. The same thing was done at the same time in Spain by Garcilaso de la Vega, and with the same success, each poet having produced a permanent effect upon the literature of his country. Sir Thomas Wyatt's name is associated with Surrey's in this reformation, and that of Boscan with Garcilaso's. The

change in England was greater than in Spain, because metrical versification was here substituted for rhythmical: to Surrey it is that the honor of this improvement must be ascribed; and as Boscan introduced the *verso suelto* into Spanish, Surrey, with better fortune, gave in English the first example of blank verse. It is uncertain whether he derived it from the Italian or the Spanish, or, which is quite as likely, whether the experiment was the result of his own conception; but in no other language has it succeeded so well as in ours, to which, indeed, it is so excellently adapted, that it might peculiarly be denominated the English metre: in no other could Shakspeare and Milton have found adequate expression for their thoughts.

In those languages wherein any of the earliest specimens of their poetry have been preserved, the verses seem generally to have been short; because, being composed when writing was either unknown or little used, and also being orally transmitted, they were in the first instance more easily endited, and in the second more readily remembered. While the art continued in a rude state, lengthening the line was no improvement; for if four feet were extended to five, it was generally done by the insertion of some useless epithet—and if to a greater length, the verse was then divided by a pause, regularly recurring in the same place. From Chaucer's time the line of five feet (whether in couplets or in stanzas) has been the most approved measure, and from Surrey's the iambic the most approved movement, in all subjects of great pith and moment. In the succeeding age there were many and important exceptions to the use of the measure; to that of the movement, few or none. The line of fourteen syllables (which, being divided at its usual resting-place, is no other than the common ballad metre) was used in translations of the *Æneid* and the *Metamorphoses*; but it is remarkable that Chapman,⁷ who employed

⁷ In the letter to Sir Robert Howard, prefatory to Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*, "the old translation of Homer by Chapman," is said to be written "in Alexandrine, or verses of six feet," the heroic metre of the French. This is one instance of Dryden's inaccuracy when he touches upon the history of his own art; and it is the more remarkable, because Chapman, having translated the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in two different measures, used the Alexandrine in neither.

it in his version of the *Iliad*, should have rendered the *Odyssey* in couplets. Most of the numerous historical poems were in stanzas, the octave being generally preferred. Drayton, who had written his *Barons' Wars* in the *Troilus* metre, changed it for this when he republished the work, saying that Ariosto's stanza was of all others the most complete and best proportioned; for it "both holds the tune clear through to the base of the column, (which is the couplet at the foot,) and closeth not but with a full satisfaction to the ear for so long detention." Drayton wrote well in every metre which he attempted; but what he thus says of the Italian stanza may be more truly said of the English one invented by Spenser, and used by him in one of the noblest works of human genius. And he committed a great error when he fixed upon the Alexandrine as the measure in which to write his *Polyolbion*; for of all measures it is that which, in our language, admits the least variety.

Neither the diction of Chaucer, nor of Surrey, — the father and the reformer of our poetry, — could have been more perfect than it was. It will not be supposed that because Surrey is thus named with Chaucer, he is placed in the same rank with him; for Chaucer stands in the first rank, with Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton; and in variety of power Shakspeare is his only peer. We know not what Surrey might have been; but little as he found leisure for composing during an active life, and that life shortened by one of those legal murders which have left an ineffaceable stain upon the memory of Henry VIII., his writings form an epoch in the history of English poetry. Where a true poetical feeling exists, even though in an inferior degree, the diction will always be that of truth and nature; and it is always otherwise with imitators, and where inclination has been mistaken for power. Corruption of language, therefore, and ephemeral styles are introduced by inferior writers; and in this respect, the course of literature, like that of ecclesiastical history, is marked by a succession of heresies, which have prevailed for a time, and then passed away. When the far-fetched words of the monastic style were banished from our versification, alliteration was brought into use, not as the principle upon which the verse

was constructed, but as its chief and indispensable ornament.⁸ This abuse of what is only ornamental when sparingly and appropriately introduced, became ridiculous, and was laughed out of fashion; but, as in religious sects, they who avoided one error ran into an opposite extreme. A loose and careless versification was sometimes adopted, that the writer might escape the affectation of a stiff and elaborate one; and while men of genius wasted their powers in fantastic conceits, substituting wit for feeling, others—who were not inferior in ability, and of better judgment, though the error into which they fell was quite as great—lowered the pitch of their poetry to a prosaic strain, as if there had been no medium between a creeping and a stilted style.

Nevertheless, more poems that are worthy of preservation were produced, in the course of half a century, than in any former or any subsequent age of English literature. It was not till toward the latter part of Elizabeth's reign that the noblest productions appeared, and poetry recovered that estimation which, according to the most illustrious of its patrons, it had lost. Sydney complains that, from almost the highest estimation of learning, it had fallen to be the

⁸ After noting that we missed "the right use of the material point of poetry," Sydney says, "now for the outside of it, which is words, or (as I may term it) diction, it is even well worse, so is that honey-flowing matron eloquence apparelled, or rather disguised in a courtesan-like painted affectation; one time with so far-fetched words that many seem monsters, but most seem strangers to any poor Englishman; another time with coursing of a letter, as if they were bound to follow the method of a dictionary."—*Defence of Poesy*.

Puttenham says, it is "nothing commendable" when a "maker takes too much delight to fill his verse with words beginning all with a letter, as an English rhymers that said

The deadly drops of dark disdain
Do daily drench my due deserts.

Many of our English makers use it too much, yet we confess it doth not ill, but prettily, become the metre, if ye pass not two or three words in one verse, and use it not very much; as he that said by way of epithet,

The smoaky sighs, the trickling tears;

and such like: for such composition makes the metre run away smoother, and passeth from the lips with more facility by iteration of a letter than by alteration, which alteration of a letter requires an exchange of ministry and office in the lips, teeth, or palate, and so doth not the iteration."

laughing-stock of children ; " that an art which was embraced," he said, " in all other places, and patronized and practised by the great, should find a hard return only in England, was what he thought the very earth lamented, and therefore decked the soil with fewer laurels than it was accustomed." " It necessarily followed," he said, " that base men with servile wits undertook it, who thought it enough if they could be rewarded of the printer." This complaint shows that if poetry had not then obtained that patronage among the great, of which Sydney himself set the example to his contemporaries, it already possessed the more effectual patronage of the public, and had become a marketable article. Poets swarmed⁹ in this country, as they did in France and Spain, and a little earlier in Italy, and in Holland a little later. And in our literature, as in our language, we took something from other countries, while they seem to have derived nothing from us.

But the poetry of every nation (more than any other branch of its literature) is colored by the national character, as the wine of different soils has its raciness. That of the Italians, in that age, was graceful, delicate, fanciful, sometimes imaginative and sublime. With the Spaniards it was stately, solemn, and fantastic, often more full of sound than meaning, yet frequently, both in its grave and in its humorous strains, worthy of a noble people. With the French it was extravagant and empty ; and, in the worst acceptance of the word, licentious, beyond that of any other nation, except at one time the Italians ; but in Italy the abomination was checked, while in France it continued in full vogue from generation to generation, till it produced a corruption and dissolution of manners, of which, happily for human nature, no other example has been known in the civilized world. In Holland, it seemed consecrated to patriotism and the household gods ; — the Dutch may be proud of their poets with as good cause as of their painters, their

⁹ Webbe says, in the preface to his *Discourse of English Poetry*, (1586,) " Among the innumerable sorts of English books, and infinite fardles of printed pamphlets, wherewith this country is pestered, all shops stuffed, and every study furnished, the greatest part, I think, in any one kind, are such as are either mere poetical, or which tend in some respect (as either in matter or form) to poetry."

scholars, their seamen, their struggle against the Spaniards, and their country,—in which art has achieved greater triumphs, and well-directed industry has produced more general comfort, than in any other part of Christendom.

Some advantage over the southern nations we derive from our language; with a little practice it would not be difficult for any one who possesses a talent for versifying to compose in it extemporaneous verses of no higher standard than those of the Improvisatore, but it would never be so easy. The northern tongues afford no such facilities as the southern for this kind of display, in which if any man of genius were to waste his powers, he would infallibly injure them. More difficulty requires more care, and where that difficulty arises not from any preposterous fashion, or unreasonable rules, but from the character of the language, it tends to improve the artist. In the Italian,—and it is the same case in the Spanish and Portuguese,—it is easy to versify, and an octave stanza is soon filled with melodious words; translate it into the same metre, and it will frequently not be possible in our briefer speech and more compressed vocabulary to fill the stave, without dilating the meaning, or adding to it. With us, too, something more than the mere collocation of words is required to distinguish verse from prose, even when the words themselves are in no degree appropriated to poetry. It is not enough that the ear should be satisfied; something must be addressed to the feelings, the fancy, or the imagination, or something presented to the understanding. That this should be required belongs to the genius of the language and to the national character, differing in this respect from those of the southern nations, and more especially from the French. Of course it must happen that poets will often deceive themselves, and that the public will often be for a while deceived, and false reputations raised. Many pieces have obtained great applause, and some to this day retain it, which could no more endure the test of just criticism, than a bubble can bear the touch.

“There are three ways,” Dr. Johnson said, “in which writing may be unnatural;—by being *bombastic*, and above nature;—*affected*, and beside it, fringing events with orna-

ments which nature did not afford ;—or *weak*, and below nature. Neither of the first could please long. The third might, indeed, please a good while, or at least please many, because imbecility, and consequently a love of imbecility, might be found in many.”¹⁰ The bombastic immediately invites ridicule, and soon yields to it :—the last personage upon the stage who spake in the vein of King Cambyses and Tamberlain was Ancient Pistol. The affected style lasts longer ; and for the same reason as the feeble. That style of poetry belongs to it which Johnson has called the metaphysical ; the designation is not fortunate, but so much respect is due to Johnson, that it would be unbecoming to substitute, even if it were easy to propose, one which might be unexceptionable.

Whether this style spread like a contagion from Italy to Spain and England, or whether it originated in the intellectual temperature of the age, and thus became endemic in the three countries, may be questioned.¹¹ It was most out of place when applied to devotional poetry,—upon which every species of false taste seems, at different times, to have fastened. Amatory poems were on the whole improved by it, because it required something more than the common-places which were the stock in trade of all mere versifiers. Cowley squandered upon this fashion powers which might have won for him the lasting fame to which he aspired. Butler alone perceived its proper application, and he, in consequence, produced a poem which, in spite of the subject, can never become obsolete while wit and wisdom are understood. With the true tact of genius he adapted his verse to his materials, and creating thus a manner of his own, derived an advantage from one of the causes which had concurred to deteriorate our versification.

Many persons possess a musical ear who have no voice for singing, but a good voice is seldom found where there is not also an ear which is capable of directing it. The case

¹⁰ Boswell's Johnson, (edition 1835,) vol. ix. 309. It is one of the observations recorded by Mr. Windham, who recorded of Johnson nothing but what was worth recording.

¹¹ Donne passed some years in Italy and in Spain ; he therefore may be supposed to have contracted the fashion in those countries, having “returned into England perfect in their languages.”—*Izaak Walton*.

is different in poetry ; the poetical feeling sometimes exists, and in a high degree, without the talent for versifying ; but the talent very commonly, without a spark of the feeling. Both Donne and Ben Jonson, the two authors by whom the metaphysical poetry was brought into vogue, were rugged versifiers. It was not, however, altogether owing to the influence of their example that the poems of this class were very generally characterized by a rough and careless versification. Their authority, indeed, afforded a sanction, of which inferior writers would willingly avail themselves ; but the fact resulted from the nature of such poetry. The poet found difficulty enough in rendering his far-fetched and elaborate conceits intelligible ; and cramp thoughts formed for themselves cramp expressions and disjointed verse.

There was another incidental cause, less obvious, but not less certain in its effect. An attempt had been made to introduce the Latin metres into English poetry ; not upon a principle of adaptation, (which has since so perfectly succeeded among the Germans,) but in strict conformance to the rules of Latin prosody ; and as those rules frequently reversed the common pronunciation, the attempt was necessarily unsuccessful. Yet earnest endeavors were made for bringing it into use, by men of great ability and great influence ; and though it never obtained any degree of public acceptance, yet specimens enough of it were published to have the effect of vilifying the art. For in this new versification nothing could be too bald and beggarly in expression, nothing too harsh in construction, nothing too inharmonious, provided it were forced into the prescribed form of verse ; and the license which the metrists took in this respect, infected other poets, though not in an equal degree.

The resemblance between fashions in literature and heresies in religion, holds good in several points ; most of them, in both cases, as they passed away, left something behind them ; but there is this difference, that the Romish church generally incorporated some of the errors and corruptions which it had opposed, while in literature nothing was ever retained except the little that was good. This resemblance also may be observed, that as many sects have originated in regarding some isolated point of doctrine, distorting it,

mistaking its relations, and exaggerating its importance, so fashions in fine literature have been devised with the intent of supplying some real or supposed defect ; and in both cases the spirit of antagonism has generally given rise to an opposite error. Thus, in the same age when Drayton produced his elaborate but monotonous poem, and the "silver-tongued" Sylvester poured forth his full and mellifluous couplets with a sonorous volubility which has rarely been equalled or approached, Browne, and Sandys, and May, composed in rhyme with the freedom of blank verse, but without the force ; Wither's pedestrian strain was only to be distinguished from prose by its rhymes ; and Chamberlaine, though his *Pharonnida* was pitched in a higher key, rhymed upon any word, however insignificant, that came in his way. All these were men of great poetical talent, some of them, indeed, of undoubted genius, capable of seducing others by their example. But in the same age, just as heresies have had the effect of causing true doctrines to be more strictly defined, Sir John Davies and Sir William Davenant, avoiding equally the opposite faults of too artificial and too careless a style, wrote in numbers which, for precision, and clearness, and felicity, and strength, have never been surpassed.

That Sir John Denham began a reformation in our verse, is one of the most groundless assertions that ever obtained belief in literature. More thought and more skill had been exercised before his time in the construction of English metre, than he ever bestowed upon the subject, and by men of far greater attainments and far higher powers. To improve, indeed, either upon the versification or the diction of our great writers, was impossible ; it was impossible to exceed them in the knowledge or in the practice of their art, but it was easy to avoid the more obvious faults of inferior authors ; and in this he succeeded just so far as not to be included in

The mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease ;

nor consigned to oblivion with the "Persons of Quality" who contributed their vapid effusions to the miscellanies of those days. His proper place is among those of his con-

temporaries and successors who called themselves Wits, and have since been entitled Poets by the courtesy of England. And as Denham has no claim to the praise which has been awarded him on this ground, Waller, to whom a larger portion has been assigned, deserves it little more. No one who, in attempting to write poetry, considered it as any thing more than an amusement for leisure hours, has ever derived improvement in the art from the writings of either.

Dryden has indeed delivered a contrary opinion in favor of both these minor poets. But Dryden was not well read in his own art; and, moreover, he often allowed his critical judgment to be biased by motives of temporary convenience. His enemies wronged him when they asserted that he had been influenced by no better motives in declaring himself a convert to the Romish church. That corrupt church, whose system is the greatest work of human wisdom and human wickedness, ever has found, and ever will find, converts among those who require narcotics either for the understanding or the conscience. I know not that Dryden ever regarded the licentiousness of his dramatic works as a sin to be repented of; nor does it appear in his writings that a state of doubt upon the most momentous subjects occasioned in him any of that uneasiness, and of those aspirations after the blessings of full faith, which are so strongly indicated in the works of his friend Davenant. His conversion appears to have been less an affair of the feelings than of the intellect, and that intellect not a comprehensive one. In his age, as in ours, the foundations on which alone the peace of individuals, as well as the security of states, can rest, had been shaken. He saw the evils of fanaticism and of religious factions at home; and he had not seen abroad the abominations consequent upon and inseparably connected with a system of established imposture. By inclination he was a skeptic,¹² by habit a conformist,

¹² "Being naturally inclined," he says, "to skepticism in philosophy, I have no reason to impose my opinions in a subject which is above it; but whatever they are, I submit them with all reverence to my mother church, accounting them no farther mine, than as they are authorized, or at least uncondemned, by her."

This was said in the preface to his *Religio Laici*, while he was yet a member of the Church of England.

professing obedience to authority as a sure and safe principle whereon to rest. But he was willing to make a merit of this obedience, and saved the pride of his philosophy by pleading that, as he believed the fundamental mysteries of revealed religion, he was bound in consequence to believe also all that the Romish church had superadded.¹³ The very weakness of the argument is proof of his sincerity; for in matters of criticism, when he was reasoning against his own better judgment, that sort of ability which makes the worse appear the better reason, was never wanting in him. He was too skilful and too sagacious ever to have advanced what was palpably fallacious, unless he had imposed upon himself by it.

But Dryden is not entitled to the same credit for sincerity in the opinions which he delivered upon poetry. He seems to have been the first eminent author in this country who practised literature as a profession, and, regarding it exclusively as such, gave up his mind to temporary subjects, and contented himself with obtaining immediate profit by the easiest means. Adulation was so common in his days, that probably he never thought himself degraded by using it; and one who offered this kind of incense without scruple, would not hesitate, among the ways of flattery, to adopt the opinions of those whom he wished to propitiate, however repugnant to his own better judgment. After telling the Marquis of Newcastle that the piece which he then dedicated to him "pretended to be nothing more than a foil to his lordship's composition;" and calling that truly noble personage, in all other respects, "the most noble poet of his age and nation;" no wonder can be felt when he asserts that his contemporaries might "justly claim precedence of Shak-

13 To take up half on trust, and half to try,
Name it not faith, but bungling bigotry.
Both knave and fool the merchant we may call,
To pay great sums and to compound the small:
For who would break with Heaven, and would not break for all?

Hind and Panther.

This argument comes to the vulgar saying, "In for a penny, in for a pound," which holds good only of risks and expenses rashly or inevitably incurred. If so base a metaphor may be allowed upon such a subject, the real state of the case is explained by saying, we pay the penny because it is a just debt, but we refuse to be swindled out of the pound.

speare in heroic plays," — that "Shakspeare's whole style is so packed with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure," — that "well placing of words, for the sweetness of pronunciation, was not known till Mr. Waller introduced it," — and that Sir John Denham's poem upon Cooper's Hill "is and ever will be, for majesty of style, the exact standard of good writing!"

When Dryden was a boy, he was more delighted with the bombastic passages in Sylvester's *Du Bartas*, than with Spenser. When he commenced his career as a poet, which was not at an early age, he took Davenant for his model, and composed his *Annus Mirabilis* in quatrains, "judging them," he said, "more noble and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us." At that time he envied the advantages which the ancients enjoyed in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme, and regretted that the moderns were "constrained in the close of that one syllable, which often confines and more often corrupts the sense of all the rest. But in this necessity of our rhymes," said he, "I have always found the couplet verse most easy, — for there the work is soonest at an end, every two lines concluding the labor of the poet; but in quatrains he is to carry it farther on; and not only so, but to bear along in his head the troublesome sense of four lines together. For those who write correctly in this kind must needs acknowledge that the last line of the stanza is to be considered in the composition of the first."

Perhaps this passage may disclose the reason why Dryden employed the couplet in his translations, and when he contracted with Jacob Tonson to furnish verses by the thousand. He could have chosen no other measure for his modernized versions of Chaucer; but the same course of reflection which, after he had written his defence of rhymed tragedies, led him in his latter years to acknowledge his error, might have induced him to cast his English Virgil in a different mould, if facility and expedition had not been with him the chief consideration. In that measure, however, he wrote not with ease only, but with a freedom and vigor which entitle him to all the praise that he has received as a great master in his art. The superiority of the couplet to

all other measures was completely established in public opinion by his example and authority ; and the versifiers of the succeeding age (for poets there were none) looked to Dryden as their model with as much deference as their predecessors in the generations between Chaucer and Surrey, had looked to the great father of English poetry.

But when Johnson asserts that before the time of Dryden, "the happy combinations of words which distinguish poetry from prose had been rarely attempted," and that "there was no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness¹⁴ of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts," — Dryden himself never advanced a more inconsiderate assertion. "From his time," says Johnson, "English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness." That it should fall back to the rudeness of an unsettled and rude speech, was impossible ; time had polished the language, and the Bible and the liturgy had fixed it ; the tendency to degenerate was in another way. Justly as Johnson condemned the metaphysical poets, he saw how superior they were to those who were trained up in the school of Dryden. "To write on their plan," he has truly said, "it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the dignity of a writer by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditionary imagery and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme and volubility of syllables."

Johnson has also said, that the veneration with which Dryden's name is pronounced by every cultivator of English literature, is paid to him for having improved the sentiments of English poetry. When he bestowed this unmerited praise, he must have forgotten Milton ; and Milton, indeed, as a poet, belonged so little to his age, that he may easily have

¹⁴ The same kind of reformation has been thus described in France, I know not by what author : *Un mélange de termes familiers et nobles défigurait tous les ouvrages sérieux. C'est Boileau qui le premier enseigna l'art de parler toujours convenablement.* But Dryden agreed neither in opinion nor in practice with Voltaire's maxim, that *plus la poésie est devenue difficile, plus elle est belle* ; a maxim quite worthy of a French critic.

been overlooked in Johnson's estimate ; but he overlooked, at the same time, every other poet who had treated any serious subject with any sense of the dignity of his calling. One effect of the Restoration had been to lower the standard of poetry ; and in this respect Dryden did nothing toward raising it. Too little ambitious of true fame, and too needy ever to have leisure for attempting to execute any great and worthy design which he may have conceived, he contented himself with subjects of temporary interest, and was beholden, perhaps, for his popularity, as much to the subjects as to the ability with which they were treated. What he called the legislative¹⁵ style of his poetry, being addressed to the judicious, could, if it found fit audience, find but few ; but when he seasoned it with political satire, then, indeed, numbers who were incapable of appreciating in any degree its literary excellence, were delighted to see their own opinions triumphantly asserted. The *Religio Laici* might deter common readers by its very title, as if it were intended only for the learned ; the Hind and Panther fell upon what to him were "evil days." But Mac Flecknoe was the talk of coffee-houses and of all literary circles ; and Absalom and Achitophel had a greater sale in the country¹⁶ than any work which was at that time remembered.

"The fury of a civil war, and power, for twenty years together, abandoned to a barbarous race of men, enemies of all good learning, had buried the muses," Dryden said, "under the ruins of monarchy ; yet," he adds, "with the restoration of our happiness, we see revived poesy lifting up its head, and already shaking off the rubbish which lay so

¹⁵ "The expressions of a poem designed purely for instruction ought to be plain and natural, and yet majestic ; for here the poet is presumed to be a kind of lawgiver, and those three qualities which I have named are proper to the legislative style. The florid, elevated, and figurative way is for the passions ; for love and hatred, fear and anger, are begotten in the soul by showing their objects out of their true proportion, either greater than the life or less ; but instruction is to be given by showing them what they naturally are. A man is to be cheated into passion, but to be reasoned into truth." — *Preface to Religio Laici*.

¹⁶ Johnson's father, who was "an old bookseller in the country, told him he had not known it equalled by any thing except Sacheverel's trial."

heavy on it." Alas ! the only poetry which lifted up its head, was that which was heard in meetings where

Flowing cups went freely round,
With no allaying Thames ;¹⁷

and it had been well if there it had been only such as might allowably and blamelessly be addressed to

Careless heads with roses crowned,
And hearts with loyal flames ;¹⁷

but the corruption of manners which ensued upon the Reformation, when profligacy succeeded to puritanism in natural course, was felt immediately in this branch of literature. It led, as it ever must lead, to a corruption of taste. Inflated tragedies ; comedies so grossly indecent that, if it were possible for them now to be brought upon the stage, they would be driven off with hootings of execration ; lewd tales in verse ; songs, epigrams, and satires, in which ribaldry or malignity served for condiment ; occasional verses, the best of which deserved to be remembered no longer than while the occasion which called them forth was recent ; — for such poetry, fit and large audience might be found, but for any thing better, the public, or, as it was then called, the Town, had neither inclination nor capacity. The age from Dryden to Pope is the worst age of English poetry.

Dryden himself lowered its tone, even while he improved the style of versification. He never aimed at any high mark. His good sense prevented him from over-valuing himself, and aspiring to become eminent either as a sublime or a pathetic poet. When he wrote for popular applause, he thought of the public with the Romish priests, *populus vult decipi et decipietur* ; he knew that, on the stage, bombast might pass for poetry, as tinsel served for gold ; and confessing that there were passages in his tragedies which called vengeance upon him for their extravagance, and which he repented of among his sins, he said, " All I can say for those passages is, that I knew they were bad enough to please, even when I wrote them."¹⁸ In

¹⁷ Lovelace.

¹⁸ Epistle Dedicatory to the Spanish Fryar.

satire, on the contrary, he felt his strength ; and in that legislative or didactic strain wherein he excelled all predecessors in his own language, he has not been excelled by any who have followed him. In this he addressed himself exclusively to the understanding ; there was nothing for the imagination, nothing for the feelings. But there was no mannerism in his style that could be aped, no mechanism that could be discovered and imitated, no artifices that could be copied, and not many of those expressions and turns of phrase which they who mistake memory for invention might add to their stock of common-places. His ease, and vigor, and perspicuity, were not attainable by imitative talents. Prior was the only one of his immediate successors who equalled him in ease ; but when Prior in his greatest work attempted to improve upon Dryden's versification, the attempt would have been more successful if it had been less evidently elaborate.

Pope carefully studied both these poets, and perhaps did not disdain to study and profit by the only respectable poem of Sir Richard Blackmore. Blackmore's *Creation* is in its diction and its numbers so unlike his miserable epics, that it seems like the work of another mind. The four epics are among the most worthless that ever were composed, though Molyneux, in his admiration of them, thought that "all our poets, except Milton, were mere ballad-makers in comparison with him," and Locke agreed in this opinion with his friend ; though Tom Browne said, that "if he had stopped his hand at *Prince Arthur*, he had gone off with some applause ;" and though Watts called them excellent, and praised the author for the happy example which he had given in all the shining colors of profuse and florid diction. Notwithstanding these eulogies, they deserved to sink in oblivion, and must irretrievably have sunk, if they had not more unfortunately been consigned to remembrance by Dryden and Pope. But Addison has said of his philosophical poem, that it is to be looked upon as one of the most useful and noble productions in our English verse ; and Johnson, who has properly included it in his *Collection of the Poets*, says of it, "It wants neither harmony of numbers, accuracy of thought, nor elegance of diction.—To

reason in verse is allowed to be difficult, but Blackmore not only reasons in verse, but very often reasons poetically, and finds the art of uniting ornament with strength, and ease with closeness. This," says Johnson, "was that which Pope might have condescended to learn from him, when he needed it so much in his *Moral Essays*." If Pope condescended to learn any thing from Blackmore, which I am inclined to think he did, he should in gratitude, as well as in justice, have bestowed on him a redeeming verse in the *Dunciad*; he was as well entitled to it as Aaron Hill.

The age of Pope was the golden age of poets,¹⁹ — but it was the pinchbeck age of poetry. They flourished in the sunshine of public and private patronage; the art meantime was debased, and it continued to be so as long as Pope continued lord of the ascendant. More injury was not done to the taste of his countrymen by Marino in Italy, nor by Gongora in Spain, than by Pope in England. The mischief was effected not by his satirical and moral pieces, for these entitle him to the highest place among poets of his class; it was by his Homer. There have been other versions as unfaithful; but none were ever so well executed in as bad a style; and no other work in the language so greatly vitiated the diction of English poetry. Common readers (and the majority must always be such) will always be taken by glittering faults, as larks are caught by bits of looking-glass: and in this meretricious translation, the passages that were most unlike the original, which were most untrue to nature, and therefore most false in taste, were

¹⁹ Zachary Grey, the editor of *Hudibras*, thought that in his time, (1744,) poetry had arrived at the summit of perfection, and that the reason thereof was the munificent regard which in this nation had been shown towards it. "If," said he, "we lament the neglected poets of former ages, we can in this congratulate double the number who now flourish, or have flourished in the midst of fame and veneration. For poor Homer, we can boast of his admirable translator; for Spenser, we can name his last editor, the late Mr. Hughes, (who enjoyed a beneficial place under the Lords Chancellors Cowper and Macclesfield;) and his son Philips, (see the *Guardian*, No. 32,) — (Ambrose, to wit!) The late Mr. Addison, Sir Richard Steele, and Mr. Congreve, may compensate for a Dryden and an Otway; and for Mr. Butler, we can refer to the late Mr. Prior and Dean Swift."

Zachary Grey was a good editor, — but he had odd notions of compensation, and of poetry.

precisely those which were most applauded, and on which critic after critic dwelt with one cuckoo note of admiration. They who found nothing imitable in Dryden, could imitate this. The art of poetry, or rather the art of versification, which was now the same thing, was "made easy to the meanest capacity."

It was said of Blackmore's verses, that if they "rhymed and rattled, all was well." In the fashion which was now established as a standard, the lines rhymed more exactly, and rattled more; and to question that standard was accounted a heresy in criticism. The point of perfection had been reached. Bishop Hurd said, "that Pope had shut the door against poetry, as Addison had by his *Drummer* against comedy."²⁰ Without disparaging the *Drummer*, it may be truly said, that we have later comedies which are quite as good; and if Pope shut the door, Cowper opened it.

Before Cowper's time, there were several who found admittance through the wicket. And it is a noticeable fact, that of all the poets in the intermediate half century, not one who attained to any distinction which he has since held, or is likely to hold, was of the school of Pope.²¹ That school has produced versifiers in abundance, but no poet. No man of genius, nor even of original talents, acknowledged his supremacy, while his authority was paramount with the public, and its blind guides. But it is not less remarkable, that among the poets of that interval, whose works have lived and deserved to live, there were none who produced such an effect "on their contemporaries or successors, that their influence can be perceived in the literature of the age, none from whom young minds received an impulse strong enough to bias in the slightest degree their future course. Except Pope himself, there is no one whose name is so generally known in other countries as the author of the *Night Thoughts*, and Pope is

²⁰ Cradock's *Recollections*, vol. iv. p. 199.

²¹ One of the greatest poets of this century, says Beattie, the late and much-lamented Mr. Gray of Cambridge, modestly declared to me, that if there was in his own numbers any thing that deserved approbation, he had learned it all from Dryden.

known only by name where that work has been rendered popular by translation. Yet though the strain of this poem is stamped with the strongest mannerism, and both the matter and the manner are of a kind to affect the reader powerfully and deeply, Blair's Grave is the only poem I can call to mind which has been composed in imitation of it. Milton has had many imitators, the best of whom have borne no happier resemblance to him, than a monumental effigy bears to the life; but a style so full of point and epigram, as Young's, deterred copyists; whereas an imitator of Milton, if he succeeded in producing a dead likeness, might satisfy himself, — for one who was capable of perceiving that the life was wanting, would never have ventured upon the audacious attempt. They who would imitate Tacitus, or Sir Thomas Brown, must be able to think like them; and Young's poetry presents a difficulty of the same kind.²²

Thomson is another poet of the same age, who had no productive influence in this sense, though in another and better way, he had a wider one than Young; for Thomson brought with him, from his own beautiful country, a deep perception and true love of the beauties of nature; for which the English poets, from Dryden to Pope, seem to have had neither eye, nor ear, nor heart. Cowper thought Thomson admirable in description,²³ and no man's judgment could carry with it more authority on this point, for his own descriptions were all from nature; not one of them second-handed; he has told us this,²⁴ and they carry their evidence with them. "But it always seemed to him," he said, "that there was something of affectation in Thomson's style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonized."²⁵ He considered him, however, as a true poet, and that his lasting fame had proved it. The opinion rested upon better ground than the proof, for Thomson's fame was not then of more than a single life's duration; and older reputations,

²² Dr. Johnson had forgotten the Night Thoughts, when he said in his life of Milton, that "the good and evil of eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit."

²³ To Mrs. King, June 19, 1788.

²⁴ To Mrs. Unwin, Oct. 10, 1784.

which for a while had spread wider and flourished more, have since that time passed away.

Little can be ascertained concerning Cowper's youthful reading and first predilections in poetry. The earliest of his poems which has been preserved, is an imitation of the *Splendid Shilling*, written in his seventeenth year; and certainly none but a boy of great power, as well as great promise, could have produced it, nor without considerable practice in verse. *Hudibras* and *Prior's Alma* were both favorites with him in early life, and at that time he often read them.²⁵ But he thought that *Solomon* was *Prior's* best poem,²⁶ whether we consider the subject or the execution; and that he is an author²⁷ who, with much labor indeed, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease. "Every man conversant with verse-writing," he says, "knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose without being prosaic, to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could accomplish this task was *Prior*: many have imitated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original."

This admiration of a poet with whom he had little that was congenial in his own mind, he probably learned from *Lloyd*, for his taste had been very much influenced by the set with which he associated in early life. He thought too meanly of *Gray* and *Mason* when his friends ridiculed them; but like those friends, he lived to perceive that he had been

²⁵ To Mr. Unwin, March 21, 1784. He asks, and with good reason, what could have suggested to *Johnson* the thought that *Alma* was written in imitation of *Hudibras*? often as he had read them in former years, he says, he never saw in them the least resemblance to each other, except that they are composed in verse of the same measure, nor could he now.

²⁶ To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 5, 1782.

²⁷ To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 17, 1782.

misled by youthful presumption,²⁸ and to make honorable amends. With Churchill he admired Dryden ; but he had none of that dislike for Pope, which in Churchill seems to have produced a feeling of personal animosity. "I could never," says Cowper, agree with those who preferred him to Dryden ; nor with others, (I have known such, and persons of taste and discernment too,) who could not allow him to be a poet at all. He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses ; and in every line he ever wrote we see indubitable marks of most indefatigable industry and labor. Writers who find it necessary to make such strenuous and painful exertions, are generally as phlegmatic as they are correct ; but Pope was, in this respect, exempted from the common lot of authors of that class. With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, and so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man ; and his beauties are such (at least sometimes) as Pope, with all his touching and retouching, could never equal."²⁹

While his first volume was in the press, he told Mr. Unwin³⁰ that he had not read an English poet for thirteen years, and but one for twenty years ; who that one may have been, there is nothing either in his correspondence or his poems that can lead us to surmise. He reckoned this among his principal advantages as a composer of verses. "Imitation," said he, "even of the best models, is my aversion ; it is servile and mechanical ; a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it ; and we imitate in spite

²⁸ See Vol. i. p. 194.

²⁹ To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 5, 1782,

³⁰ Nov. 24, 1781.

of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire. Two years afterwards it appears that he persisted in the same opinion ; "Poetry," said he, "English poetry, I never touch, being pretty much addicted to the writing of it, and knowing that much intercourse with those gentlemen betrays us unavoidably into a habit of imitation, which I hate and despise most cordially." ³¹

When Cowper said that he had read no English poetry for so many years, the words must not be too literally taken ; he can only have meant that he had perused none with that degree of attention, or that frequency, which might have affected his own compositions. When Johnson's edition of the British Poets appeared, Mr. Unwin lent them to him. His remark, when he had merely looked into some of the volumes, was, "A few things I have met with, which if they had been burnt the moment they were written, it would have been better for the author, and at least as well for his readers. There is not much of this, but a little is too much. I think it a pity the editor admitted any ; the English muse would have lost no credit by the omission of such trash." ³²

England, I believe, is the only country in which any general collection of its poets has been attempted. The first was brought forward by a noted bookseller, named John Bell, to whom the artists of that time were beholden for some opportunities of making themselves known, and of whom, more than of any other publisher, it may be said that he introduced a taste for fine printing. He, in the year 1777, announced an edition of the Poets of Great Britain, complete, from Chaucer to Churchill. The more respectable of the London booksellers, ³³ regarding this as an inva-

³¹ To Mr. Hill, Nov. 23, 1783.

³² To Mr. Unwin, May 26, 1779.

³³ Mr. Dilly, the bookseller, who states these circumstances at the time in a letter to Boswell, calls Bell's a little trifling edition ; and says that the type was so extremely small that many persons could not read it, and not only this inconvenience attended it, but the inaccuracy of the press was very conspicuous." — *Croker's Boswell*, vol. iii. p. 474.

I know not whether Johnson's edition was more accurate ; but this I know, that unless the press be carefully compared with the last

sion of what they called their literary property, (as by the custom of the trade it was considered to be,) resolved upon publishing a rival edition, which should have the advantages of an ostensible and competent editor, of a more correct text, and of including several authors, whose works, being still copyright by law, could not be printed unless with the consent of those publishers in whom that right was vested. Dr. Johnson, as holding deservedly the highest rank among his contemporaries, was the person whom they solicited to undertake the task, and to write the lives of the poets. And they, also, like Bell, proposed to commence with Chaucer, and include all the English poets down to their own time.

The selection, however, was made not by the editor, but by the booksellers; and they were directed in it by no other criterion than that of public opinion, as evinced in the demand for certain books; the poet whose works were not called for was dead to them. Departing, therefore, on that consideration, from their first intention, instead of commencing their collection with Chaucer, they began with Cowley. Bell's comprised only three earlier writers, Chaucer, Spenser, and Donne: and it is not to the honor of our country that his collection, which was a mere bookseller's affair, and on which no care or attention was bestowed, should still contain the only convenient and most complete edition of the works of the great father of English poetry.

When Cowper first looked into Johnson's collection, some of the writers therein included, seemed in his opinion to have but a very disputable right among the classics. "I am quite at a loss," said he, "when I see them in such company, to conjecture what is Dr. Johnson's idea or definition of classical merit. But if he inserts the poems of some who can hardly be said to deserve such an honor, the purchaser may comfort himself with the hope that he will

edition of a book that has passed under the author's own eye, every new edition will introduce new corruptions into the text, and of the very worst kind, by the careless substitution of words which, without making nonsense of the passage, alter its meaning, or destroy its beauty.

exclude none that do."³⁴ Johnson himself was only responsible for the insertion of Blackmore's *Creation*, *Pomfret*, *Yalden*, and *Watts*. Cowper also would have given *Watts* a place there, deeming him, "if I am," he says, "a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability; careless indeed for the most part, and inattentive to those niceties which constitute elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions, and masterly in his execution:"³⁵ — higher praise than that busy-minded and benevolent good man is entitled to as a poet. The *Creation*, too, he would have admitted, for he thought that Blackmore shone in that work, "though he had written," he said, "more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country."³⁶ This is not the judgment which he would have pronounced if he had read all or any of Sir Richard's epics; for they are uniformly grave and dull, and it is rarely that a ray of absurdity enlivens them. For *Pomfret*, — the wonder is not that Johnson introduced, but that the bookseller should have overlooked one who would at that time certainly have been elected by universal suffrage to a seat in the assembly of poets. *Yalden* was indebted for it to the editor's special grace.

The perusal of Johnson's *Lives* left an uncomfortable impression upon Cowper. "It is a melancholy observation," he says, "which it is impossible not to make, after having run through this series, that where there were such shining talents, there should be so little virtue. These luminaries of our country seem to have been kindled into a brighter blaze than others, only that their spots might be more noticed: — so much can nature do for our intellectual part, and so little for our moral! — I know not but one might search these volumes with a candle, as the prophet says, to find a man, and not find one, unless, perhaps, Arbuthnot were he."³⁷ — "In all the number I observe but one man (a poet of no great fame, — of whom I did not know that he existed till I found him there) whose mind

³⁴ To Mr. Unwin, May 26, 1779.

³⁵ To Mr. Newton, Sept. 18, 1781.

³⁷ To Mr. Unwin, March 21, 1784.

³⁶ Ibid.

seems to have had the slightest tincture of religion ; and he was hardly in his senses. His name was Collins. He sunk into a state of melancholy, and died young. Not long before his death, he was found, at his lodgings in Islington, by his biographer, with the New Testament in his hand. He said to Johnson, 'I have but one book ; but it is the best.' Of him, therefore, there are some hopes. But from the lives of all the rest, there is but one inference to be drawn — that poets are a very worthless, wicked set of people."³⁸

The opinion thus severely expressed was as inconsiderately formed as it is uncharitable. In proof of it, he alleged that Dryden was a sycophant to the public taste, sinning against his feelings, lewd in his writings, though chaste in his conversation ; that Pope was vain and petulant, painfully sensible of censure, and yet restless in provocation ; that Addison stooped to mean artifices in hopes of injuring the reputation of his friend ; and that Savage was a profligate scoundrel. Now it is true, that nothing is known of Savage but what is bad ; and yet he who was remembered with so much affection by so good a man as Johnson, could not have been without some redeeming qualities. And if Cowper had not been under the immediate influence of dark and morbid views, he would have called to mind that there is nothing injurious to morality in any of Dryden's living works (his comedies have happily been long defunct) ; that Pope was intentionally, as well as professedly, a moral poet ; and that Addison might be truly said to have left "no line, which, dying, he could wish to blot !" They had their failings as all men have, but those failings are more conspicuous in their biography than they were in their lives ; the general tenor of which, if not blameless, (for of whom can that be said ?) deserved and obtained, in a high degree, the esteem and respect of those to whom they were best known. But what he thus said, was an effusion of splenetic feeling in some gloomy hour, not the result of reflection, nor in accord with his disposition. He did not call to mind how many of those writers, whose

³⁸ To Mr. Newton, March 19, 1784.

lives Johnson has recorded, were men of irreproachable conversation, who departed in the faith and fear of the Lord; and he himself has said, not less piously than charitably, "that the mercy which can forgive iniquity, will never be severe to mark our frailties."³⁹

That he should never before have heard of Collins, shows how little Collins had been heard of in his lifetime; and that Cowper, in his knowledge of contemporary literature, was now awakening, as it were, from a sleep of twenty years. In the course of those years Collins's Odes, which were utterly neglected on their first appearance, had obtained their due estimation. It will never be forgotten in the history of English poetry, that with a generous, and a just, though impatient sense of indignation, Collins, as soon as his means enabled him, repaid the publisher the price which he had received for their copyright, indemnified him for his loss in the adventure, and committed the remainder, which was by far the greater part of the impression, to the flames. But it should also be remembered, that in the course of one generation these poems, without any adventitious aid to bring them into notice, were acknowledged to be the best of their kind in the language. Silently and imperceptibly they had risen by their own buoyancy, and their power was felt by every reader who had any true poetic feeling.⁴⁰

But if Collins was a name unknown till then to Cowper, Churchill was still with him "the great Churchill," though that reputation, which had risen like a meteor, seemed to have passed away like one. Collins had been neglected during his life; a more cruel neglect was Churchill's portion after his death. Only a day before that event took place, he made his will, wherein it is mournful to observe there is not the slightest expression of religious faith or hope. He said in it, "I desire my dear friend, John Wilkes, Esq., to

³⁹ To Lady Hesketh, Oct. 10, 1765.

⁴⁰ Johnson, though he seems to have loved and respected Collins, never betrayed his want of that feeling more than when he summed up the criticism on his writings, by saying, that "as men are often esteemed who cannot be loved, so the poetry of Collins may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure."

collect and publish my works, with the remarks and explanations he has prepared, and any others he thinks proper to make." There can be no doubt that Wilkes, who was with him during his illness, engaged to undertake this office, nor that he intended to perform it; for though he could feign friendship when he sought to make any one his dupe, his affections where he felt it were sincere and warm. "As to the province our dear Churchill has allotted me," he says in one of his letters, "I will do it to the best of my poor abilities. My life shall be dedicated to it."⁴¹ In another, written a fortnight after his friend's death, he writes, "I am better, but cannot get any continued sleep. The idea of Churchill is ever before my eyes. A pleasing melancholy will, perhaps, succeed in time, and then I shall be fit for something. As I am, there is not a more useless animal in the world. My mind turns much on my dear friend's request about his works. I desire to live, first, to show my gratitude to my friends, then my detestation of our enemies!"⁴²—"I begin to recover from the late cruel blow, but I believe I shall never get quite over it."⁴³—"You know in what a restless state a man's spirits must be, who does not sleep. Churchill is still before my eyes."⁴⁴

The promised edition was to be worthy of his deceased friend, and of himself. "He would never," he said, "risk any crudities with the public. No man who has any reputation was ever written out of it, but by himself."⁴⁵ Some months afterward, telling his daughter how closely he was employed upon his friend's works, he said, "You see how much I have at heart to show the world how I loved Churchill, and what influence those I loved, even when gone from us, retain over me." "The loss of Churchill," he said, "he should always think the most cruel of all the afflictions he had suffered, and he would soon convince mankind that he knew how to value such superior genius and merit."⁴⁶ His first intention was to print the work at Lausanne, and Voltaire, whom he visited at this time, offered him the assistance of his printers. Giving up this plan, he

⁴¹ To Mr. Cotes, Nov. 11, 1764.

⁴² Nov. 19.

⁴³ Nov. 26.

⁴⁴ Dec. 10.

⁴⁵ April 23, 1765.

⁴⁶ To Mr. Cotes, May 21.

proposed printing it at Naples, where he had settled himself, as he supposed, for a time, during his outlawry; when he found that there were obstacles to his design there, he thought again of Lausanne, or of Geneva, or Amsterdam, there to publish a first edition of his dear friend's valuable remains, leaving it to a second to rectify the mistakes which his long absence from England might occasion. He said that he had already more than half finished it. "I am ever intent," said he to Humphrey Cotes, "on doing honor to the memory of a departed friend, whom I most dearly loved; and all the services to my native country, which are in the reach of my poor abilities. You, Lord Temple, and a few more, will find the just tribute of praise which the public and I owe you. Bute, Holland, and Sandwich, will see that I think of them just as I did in England."

He talked largely of his annotations.⁴⁷ "No man," said he, "has ever taken more pains that notes (a dull business of itself) may not disgrace his fair classic page. How pleased is the dear shade of our friend with all I have done! I am sure of it." But the promised oblation to his friend's shade was never performed. The few notes which Wilkes had actually prepared, were not published till after his own death, some forty years afterwards; and were then found to contain little or nothing more than a repetition of well-known facts, of malice which had previously done its worst, and of profligacy which had long been sufficiently notorious. Churchill's poems were indeed brought together in a collected form, but not by Wilkes, nor in a new edition; the

⁴⁷ Much was expected from them, even by foreigners. In the *Mémoires Secrets* for that year, is the following article:—22 Nov. *La Littérature Angloise vient de faire une perte considérable par la mort de M. Charles Churchill, que ses Satyres ont rendu célèbre. Il avoit passé de Londres à Boulogne pour voir son ami M. Wilkes, devenu par ses Satyres en prose encore plus célèbre que lui. Il y est mort d'une fièvre milliaire. Il a chargé par son testament M. Wilkes de recueillir et de publier ses ouvrages, avec des remarques et des explications. Personne n'est plus propre à bien exécuter cette commission. M. Wilkes et M. Churchill pensoient et sentoient de même.* Vol. ii. p. 133.

The French writer adds, "*Il est dommage que les Satyres de M. Churchill soient trop personnelles, et que le fond tiennne à des querelles de parti et à des circonstances momentanées, dont l'intérêt varie et se perd bientôt.*" They who were not under the influence of party feeling could perceive this.

remaining copies of his several pieces were merely arranged in two volumes, and published by subscription. A single poem, the only complete one found among his papers, was all that was added. Professing in this to take for his subject,

A plain, unlabored journey of a day,

he exhorted the Muses to amuse themselves with his contemporary poets during his absence, and concluded some of his most vigorous, but most misdirected satire with these lines : —

Thus, or in any better way they please,
With these great men, or with great men like these,
Let them their appetite for laughter feed ;
I on my journey all alone proceed.

Little did he apprehend, when that last verse was written, whither and how soon he was about to depart !

Nor is this the only passage wherein the poet may seem to have unconsciously written a prophetic strain with regard to himself.

Some of my friends, (for friends I must suppose
All who, not daring to appear my foes,
Feign great good will, and, not more full of spite
Than full of craft, under false colors fight ;)
Some of my friends, (so lavishly I print,
As more in sorrow than in anger, hint,
(Though that indeed will scarce admit a doubt,)
That I shall run my stock of genius out, —
My no great stock, — and publishing so fast,
Must needs become a bankrupt at the last.

* * * *

“The mind of man craves rest, and cannot bear,
Though next in power to God’s, continual care.
Genius himself (nor here let genius frown)
Must, to insure his vigor, be laid down,
And fallowed well. Had Churchill known but this,
Which the most slight observer scarce could miss,
He might have flourished twenty years or more,
Though now alas, poor man ! worn out in four.”

* * * *

Perturbed spirits rest, nor thus appear
To waste your counsels on a spendthrift’s ear.

On your grave lessons I cannot subsist,
 Nor even in verse become economist.
 Rest then, my friends ; nor, hateful to my eyes,
 Let Envy in the shape of Pity rise
 To blast me ere my time ; with patience wait,
 ('Tis no long interval,) propitious Fate
 Shall glut your pride, and every son of phlegm
 Find ample room to censure and condemn.
 Read some three hundred lines (no easy task,
But probably the last that I shall ask,)
 And give me up forever. Wait an hour,
 Nay, not so much, — revenge is in your power,
 And ye may cry, ere time hath turned his glass,
 Lo ! what we prophesied is come to pass !

The unexpected death of a man in the flower of his age, who during four years had been one of the most conspicuous persons in England, and certainly the most popular poet, occasioned a strong feeling among that part of the public to whose political prepossessions and passions he had addressed himself. Some of his admirers were inconsiderate enough to talk of erecting a monument to him in Westminster Abbey ; but if permission had been asked, it must necessarily have been refused ; it would indeed have been not less indecent to grant, than to solicit such an honor for a clergyman who had thrown off his gown, and renounced, as there appeared too much reason to apprehend, his hope in Christ. His associates undoubtedly wished to have it believed that he had shown as little regard to religion in the last hours,⁴⁸ as in the latter years of his life ; and though they obtained Christian burial for him, by bringing the body from Boulogne to Dover, where it was

⁴⁸ " Mr. Davies, in his Life of Garrick, upon what he thinks good authority, hath related, that Churchill's last words were, *What a fool have I been !*" Though he might, on several accounts, have had too much cause to make such a reflection, it is not true that it was made by him. ' This,' says Dr. Kippis, ' we have been assured of by Mr. Wilkes, whose testimony upon the subject must be decisive ; and the same gentleman hath informed the world, that the goodness of Churchill's heart, and the firmness of his philosophy, were in full lustre during the whole time of his very severe illness ; and that the amazing faculties of his mind were not in the least impaired till a few moments before his death.' " — *Biog. Britannica*.

Wilkes's testimony would be worth nothing on this point, if it were not corroborated by the last will and testament of his unhappy friend.

interred in the old cemetery which once belonged to the collegiate church of St. Martin, they inscribed upon his tombstone, instead of any consolatory or monitory text, this epicurean line from one of his own poems,

Life to the last enjoyed, here Churchill lies.

Wilkes erected a monument to his friend's memory, in the grounds of his cottage at Sandham, in the Isle of Wight. It was a broken pillar, fluted, and of the Doric order, nine feet high, and five in diameter, placed in a grove, with weeping willows, cypresses, and yews behind, laurels beside it, and bays, myrtles, laburnums, and other shrubs in the foreground. A tablet, on the pillar, bore this inscription : —

CAROLO CHURCHILL,
AMICO JUCUNDO,
POETÆ ACRI,
CIVI OPTIME DE PATRIA MERITO
P.
JOHANNES WILKES.
MDCCLXV.

The same words he inscribed upon a sepulchral alabaster urn, sent him from Rome by the Abbe Winckelman, who was then the superintendent of the antiquities in that city.

The only laudable part of Churchill's conduct during his short career of popularity was that he carefully laid by a provision for those who were dependent on him. This was his meritorious motive for that greediness of gain with which he was reproached,⁴⁹ — as if it were any reproach to a successful author that he doled out his writings in the way most advantageous for himself, and fixed upon them as high a price as his admirers were willing to pay. He thus enabled himself to bequeath an annuity of sixty pounds to his widow, and of fifty to the more unhappy woman, who, after they had both repented of their guilty

⁴⁹ "Go on, illustrious bard" (said a Monthly Reviewer, vol. xxxi. p. 275.) Thou art in the right road to independence. Indulge the reigning depravity of taste; get deeper still in dirt; the half-crowns will wash thee clean. Leave elegance and harmony to others; in these *stirring* times they will not procure thee sixpence. To use thy own phraseology, 'they will not go to market.'"

intercourse, had fled to him again for the protection which she knew not where else to seek. And when these duties had been provided for, there remained some surplus for his two sons. Well would it be if he might be as fairly vindicated on other points. He left for publication ten sermons, which he had sold to his publishers for two hundred and fifty pounds, that price being afforded in consideration of a dedicatory poem to Bishop Warburton, in a strain of the severest sarcasm. The dedication was found unfinished among his papers, but there was enough of it to secure the sale of an otherwise unsalable book,⁵⁰ and to evince once more the vigor and the acrimony of the writer. Such an introduction to a volume of sermons would have excited the indignation of any well-regulated mind, if it had appeared during the author's life ; as a posthumous work, it occasioned a more painful feeling ; and Warburton may have contemplated with sorrow what he would otherwise have regarded with scorn.

Churchill hated Warburton for no apparent cause, except that he thought himself bound in friendship to take up all Wilkes's quarrels, and the Bishop had complained in the House of Lords of a gross and flagitious insult which that profligate had offered him. Yet there were more points of resemblance between Warburton and Churchill than any other two men of their age ; they resembled each other in

⁵⁰ The Monthly Reviewer, however, seems to have thought that Churchill's name would have been attraction sufficient. He says, "Though there is scarce any species of composition which meets with a cooler reception from the generality of readers than sermons, Churchill's Sermons will undoubtedly excite great curiosity. Those who admire the bold and daring genius of the poet, will expect something extraordinary in the preacher, and will open the volume with great impatience."

The whole satire is extracted in this reviewal, which concludes with a remark not the less striking for being obvious : — "We cannot help observing that Churchill the poet and Churchill the preacher appear to be very different characters. In his poems he is an outrageous and merciless satirist ; in his sermons a meek and peaceable Christian. Yet, strange as the mixture may seem, in the present publication he is *both* characters in *one* ! It is really an extraordinary appearance to see a commentary on that form of prayer composed by Benevolence itself, preceded by a virulent libel ! — But let us not forget, that when this enraged wasp, for the last time, darted his sting at Warburton, it *broke*, and the poor angry soul expired !" — Vol. xxxii. pp. 101, 109.

strength of character, in vigor and activity of mind, in their contemptuous sense of superiority over all who opposed them, and in a certain coarseness of nature, which was marked in the countenance of both, — which Churchill did not fail to note⁵¹ in the object of his enmity, — and of which he was not unconscious in himself.⁵²

In his bitter dedication, Churchill says : —

Much did I wish, though little could I hope,
A friend in him who was the friend of Pope.

Perhaps that wish may have been really entertained ; and if favorable circumstances had introduced them to each other before the revolution in Churchill's character was effected, he might have found as much pleasure and intellectual sympathy in Warburton's society as he afterwards did in Wilkes's ; they would have admired and liked each other ; and if the Bishop had failed to awaken in him a perception of the beauty of holiness and the truth of reli-

⁵¹ 'Tis not thy face, — though that by Nature's made
An index to thy soul ; though there displayed
We see thy mind at large, and through thy skin
Peeps out that courtesy which dwells within.

⁵² The portrait of himself is a full length : —

A bear, whom, from the moment he was born,
His dam despised, and left unlicked in scorn ;
A Babel, which, the power of Art undone,
She could not finish when she had begun ;
An utter Chaos, out of which no might,
But that of God, could strike one spark of light.

Broad were his shoulders, and from blade to blade
A H—— might at full length have laid :
Vast were his bones, his muscles twisted strong ;
His face was short, but broader than 'twas long ;
His features, though by nature they were large,
Contentment had contrived to overcharge
And bury meaning ; save that we might spy
Sense lowering on the penthouse of his eye.
His arms were two twin oaks ; his legs so stout
That they might bear a mansion-house about ;
Nor were they, look but at his body there,
Designed by fate a much less weight to bear.

O'er a brown cassock, which had once been black,
Which hung in tatters on his brawny back, —
A sight most strange and awkward to behold, —
He threw a covering of blue and gold.
Just at that time of life, when man, by rule,
The fop laid down, takes up the graver fool,
He started up a fop, and, fond of show,
Looked like another Hercules, turned beau !

Independence, v. 149—174.

heigion, he would at least have made him feel the rashness and
 used the folly of infidelity.

was As he hated Warburton for Wilkes's sake, so, perhaps, it
 did may have been partly for Warburton's sake that he hated
 hied Pope,—for his dislike of Pope amounted to hatred. He
 is said to have wished him alive, not only that he might
 have a struggle with him for preëminence, but that he
 might endeavor to break his heart. Though such bravados
 of malignity are, for the most part, far from meaning all
 that they express, they can never be uttered or conceived
 without self-injury. He disliked Pope's manner as a poet,
 and his character as a man,⁵³ and had formed the intention
 of attacking both.⁵⁴ "Mr. Pope," said he, in a letter to
 Wilkes, "ought surely to feel some instinctive terrors, for
 against him I have double-pointed all my little thunder-
 bolts ; in which, as to the design, I hope I shall have your
 approbation when you consider his heart ; and as to the exe-
 cution, if you approve it, I can sit down easily and hear with
 contempt the censures of all the half-blooded, prudish lords."
 It is not to be regretted that Churchill contented himself
 with libelling the living, and never carried into effect this
 injurious intention which he had entertained against the
 dead ; for the force of even just criticism is weakened when
 it is delivered with an asperity that savors of personal ma-

⁵³ The Monthly Review observes that this "enmity, which broke
 out so long after Pope's death, is somewhat extraordinary, and the
 more so, as the satirist's spleen seems chiefly to have been directed
 against his *private character* — a circumstance in regard to which, we
 believe, there are not many who hold the two poets in equal estimation.
 What ample room is there for recrimination on the traducer of Mr.
 Pope's heart ! But it were unnecessary, as well as an ungrateful task,
 to enlarge on this topic — since few, if any, of our readers are stran-
 gers to the moral character and conduct of Charles Churchill." — Vol.
 xli. p. 378.

⁵⁴ Wilkes says, he "intended to have sifted every part of his char-
 acter," and Wilkes gives his own opinion of Pope. "His writings,"
 he says, "almost the only truly correct, elegant, and high-finished
 poems in our language, breathe the purest morality, the most perfect
 humanity and benevolence. In the commerce of life, however, he
 showed himself not scrupulously moral, and was a very selfish, splen-
 etic, malevolent being. The friends whom he most loved were the
 sworn enemies of the liberties of his country — Atterbury, Oxford, and
 Bolingbroke, on whom he lavished the sweet incense of a delicate,
 exquisite praise, which ought only to have been purchased by virtue."

levollence. But if "it disgusted Churchill to hear Pope extolled as the first of English poets," his own judgment was not less erroneous when he assigned that place to Dryden. Dryden was, indeed, the best model whom, with his power and turn of mind, he could have chosen for himself, even if that power had always taken its best direction. He followed him with success. The freedom and vigor of his versification, in which sense was never sacrificed to sound, which was never tricked out with tinsel, nor spangled with false ornaments, which, whatever were its faults, was free from nonsense, and which always expressed, in genuine English, its clear meaning, contributed to prepare the way for a better taste than prevailed during Pope's undisputed supremacy. The injurious effects which had been caused by that dictatorship were weakened by Churchill's rule as Tribune of the people.

His immediate imitators were a despicable race; among his numerous opponents there had been a few whose greatest disadvantage was, that they took the better side, which, under a tribunate, is always the unsuccessful one; but those who attempted to tread in his steps, and succeed him, were mere libelers,⁵⁵ with no other qualification than their impudence; — "a Calmuck tribe of authors," they were called, "the brood of Churchill's spawn, and the heirs of his Billingsgate fortune." They passed away like a swarm of noxious insects; and Churchill himself was for a time depreciated⁵⁶ as unduly as he had been ex-

⁵⁵ "The dominions of Alexander the Great had not more competitors after his decease, than the poetical demesnes of the late Mr. Churchill. Various, indeed, are the candidates, but their pretences are nearly the same; — to measure couplets, to scatter abuse, and to praise the bard whose name they 'take in vain.' Their ambition, at the same time, is as sordid as their verse, for it is not Mr. Churchill's crown of laurel that they seek, but his half crown sterling." — *Monthly Review*, February, 1765, vol. xxxii. p. 153.

Twenty years before, a wretched precursor of these libelists complained of the restraint under which his "Indignant Muse" labored: —

"Names must be concealed: O misfortune dire!
Law checks my rage, and lawyers damp my fire."

⁵⁶ "A remarkable instance," says Dr. Kippis, "of a sudden and short-lived celebrity — and of a more than usual rapidity in the neglect paid to his writings."

"We all remember," says Dr. Warton, "when *even* a Churchill was more in vogue than a Gray."

telled. The first who rendered justice to his genius was Cowper : —

While servile trick and imitative knack
 Confine the million in the beaten track,
 Perhaps some courser, who disdains the road,
 Snuffs up the wind, and flings himself abroad.
 Contemporaries all surpassed, see one,
 Short his career indeed, but ably run ;
 Churchill, himself unconscious of his powers,
 In penury consumed his idle hours ;
 And, like a scattered seed at random sown,
 Was left to spring by vigor of his own.
 Lifted, at length, by dignity of thought
 And dint of genius, to an affluent lot,
 He laid his head on luxury's soft lap,
 And took too often there his easy nap.
 If brighter beams than all he threw not forth,
 'Twas negligence in him, not want of worth.
 Surly and slovenly, and bold and coarse ;
 Too proud for art, and trusting in mere force ;
 Spendthrift alike of money and of wit ;
 Always at speed, and never drawing bit, —
 He struck the lyre in such a careless mood,
 And so disdained the rules he understood,
 The laurel seemed to wait on his command ;
 He snatched it rudely from the Muses' hand.⁹⁷

When Johnson's collection of the poets was lent to Cowper, he read but few of them. "Those of established reputation," said he, "are so fresh in my memory, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again : and as to the minor classics, I did not think them worth reading at all. I tasted most of them, and did not like them." But Churchill had been included in Bell's collection, where he brought up the rear ; and in the same letter which expresses his disrespect for the mediocrists, Cowper says, "I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first. — He is indeed a careless writer for the most part ; but where shall we find in any of those authors who finish their works with the exactness of a Flemish pencil, those bold and daring strokes of fancy, those numbers so hazardously ven-

⁹⁷ Table Talk.

tured upon and so happily finished, the matter so compressed, and yet so clear, and the coloring so sparingly laid on, and yet with such a beautiful effect? In short, it is not his least praise, that he is never guilty of those faults as a writer which he lays to the charge of others; a proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics; but that he was qualified to do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much and so fast would, through inadvertence and hurry, have departed from rules which he might have found in books; but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err."⁵⁸

When he was composing his first volume, Cowper reckoned it among his principal advantages that he had read no English poetry for many years. But as the poems whereby he became known to the public were all written when he was advanced considerably beyond the middle age, he was less likely to be tinctured by the manner of any favorite author than youthful aspirants must always be. And the same cause would have prevented him from being influenced by contemporary writers, even if his habits of retired life, and the total desuetude of poetical reading for so many years, had not kept him unacquainted with any thing that had been published during half a generation. If there was any savor of other poets in his pieces, it was of Lloyd in some of the smaller ones, and of Churchill in his satires.

When Cowper, however, commenced author, he perceived the necessity of reading. "He that would write," said he, "should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that, being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own."⁵⁹ Just after he had finished *The Task*, he purchased a Latin Dictionary. "It is rather strange," said he to Mr. Unwin,⁶⁰ "that at my time of life, and after a youth spent in classical pursuits, I should want one; and stranger still, that, being possessed at present of only one Latin author in the world, I should think it worth

⁵⁸ To Mr. Unwin.

⁵⁹ To Mr. Unwin, Nov. 26, 1781.

⁶⁰ July 3, 1784.

while to purchase one. I say that it is strange, and indeed I think it so myself. But I have a thought that when my present labors of the pen are ended, I may go to school again, and refresh my spirits by a little intercourse with the Mantuan and the Sabine bards; and perhaps by a reperusal of some others, whose works we generally lay by at that period of life when we are best qualified to read them,—when, the judgment and the taste being formed, their beauties are least likely to be overlooked.” —“I have bought a great dictionary,” he says to Mr. Newton,⁶¹ “and want nothing but Latin authors to furnish me with the use of it. Had I purchased them first, I had begun at the right end; but I could not afford it. I beseech you admire my prudence.” Horace was the Latin author which he possessed; but he had borrowed Virgil from one neighbor, and Homer, with a Clavis, from another, and had had them for some years.

His English reading at that time was upon scarcely a wider scale. “My studies,” he says, “are very much confined, and of little use, because I have no books but what I borrow, and nobody will lend me a memory: my own is almost worn out. I read the *Biographia* and the *Review*. If all the readers of the former had memories like mine, the compilers of that work would in vain have labored to rescue the great names of past ages from oblivion; for what I read to-day I forget to-morrow. A by-stander might say, ‘This is rather an advantage; the book is always new.’ But I beg the by-stander’s pardon: I can recollect, though I cannot remember; and with the book in my hand I recognize those passages, which, without the book, I should never have thought of more. The *Review* pleases me most, because if the contents escape me, I regret them less, being a very supercilious reader of most modern writers. Either I dislike the subject, or the manner of treating it; the style is affected, or the matter is disgusting.”⁶²

But in one of these points Cowper depreciated himself, and in the other he wronged himself. There are indications enough in his poems of a practical and retentive memory; and the facility with which he composed Latin verses after

⁶¹ July 5, 1784.

⁶² To Mr. Newton, April 20, 1783.

so many years' disuse, is proof not only that he had been well taught, but that he well remembered what he had once learned. Neither was he so fastidious a reader as he represented himself to be, and as he formerly had been. There is a time of life at which men of genius — and still more men of talents — are likely to be so, when they are fully aware of their own powers, and have not attained the knowledge of their own deficiencies. They are then more disposed to descry faults in a book, however good, and to seek in it for matter of ridicule, than to learn from it and be thankful. Such a temper had prevailed in the Nonsense Club; but even poor Lloyd lived long enough to outgrow it: Colman made ample amends to Mason for his share in the mock lyrics, by bringing Elfrida and Caractacus upon the stage; and Cowper, though he accused himself of being a supercilious reader, had long before seen and acknowledged, that in proportion as he had been so in early life, his judgment had been warped by prejudice.⁶³ Indeed, unless he were provoked by some gross injustice of criticism, or some glaring faults in style, he was disposed to think favorably of any book that entertained him, and to rate its merits at their full value — certainly never to depreciate them. When he looked at the world "through the loopholes of retreat," it was from a distance at which none of its sounds were audible. He knew nothing of the public opinion concerning current literature, except what the Monthly Review told him, and sometimes the Gentleman's Magazine;⁶⁴ in this respect he exercised his own unbiassed judgment; and if at any time the balance was not evenly held, it was when it inclined on the side of indulgence.

From the time when he "left the herd," like "a stricken deer," till he became known as the author of the *Task*, two and twenty years had elapsed; and in the course of those years the public had gradually and insensibly been prepared for the reception of such a poem. Public taste was at a low ebb when Cowper joined in the laugh against Gray and Mason; and the few persons who perceived and lamented

⁶³ See vol. i. p. 194.

⁶⁴ The one he saw regularly, the other only occasionally.

that it was so, inferred that public feeling was lower than it really was — perhaps than it ever can be. For no corruption of taste, however prevalent, can wholly destroy in the public mind that moral sense to which true poetry appeals.

When Beattie began his *Minstrel*, he said he was morally certain that it never would be finished, and that he had resolved to write no more poetry, with a view to publication, till he saw some dawnings of a poetical taste among the generality of readers; of which, said he, there is not at present any thing like an appearance.⁶⁵ Gray once expressed an opinion that his *Elegy* owed its popularity wholly to the subject, and that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose.⁶⁶ This was not altogether true; for there is a charm in metre, as there is in music; it is of the same kind, though the relation may be remote; and it differs less in degree, perhaps, than one who has not an ear for poetry can believe. Johnson may be forgiven all the wrongful decrees which he pronounced in criticism, for having preserved this stanza: ⁶⁷

Verse sweetens toil, however rude the sound:
All at her work the village maiden sings;
Nor, while she turns the giddy wheel around,
Revolves the sad vicissitudes of things.

A sweeter stanza never was composed: but apart from the pensive reflection which is there so exquisitely expressed, what it affirms of the general influence of verse upon mankind, is a truth which all who have ears to hear may have perceived. Without songs, there could be no popular music, and without verse no songs;—none of those melodies, which, having been heard in youth or childhood, are recalled to memory, or awaken there of themselves, in middle or old age, and with which the words, and feelings, and sentiments, wherewith they were linked, revive also, and

⁶⁵ Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, vol. i. p. 80.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 73.

⁶⁷ He repeated it at Nairn, upon hearing a girl sing an Erse song while she was spinning wool with a great wheel. Boswell thought he had heard the lines before. "I fancy not, sir," said Johnson; "for they are in a detached poem, the name of which I do not remember, written by one Giffard, a parson." The poem is said, in a note of Malone's, to have been hitherto undiscovered.

local recollections, and all that is connected with them. Gray's *Elegy* owes much of its popularity to its strain of verse; the strain of thought alone, natural and touching as it is, would never have impressed it upon the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands, unless the diction and metre in which it was embodied had been perfectly in unison with it. Beattie ascribed its general reception to both causes. "It is a poem," he says, "which is universally understood and admired, not only for its poetical beauties, but also, and perhaps chiefly, for its expressing sentiments in which every man thinks himself interested, and which, at certain times, are familiar to all men." Neither cause would have sufficed for producing so general, and extensive, and permanent an effect, unless the poem had been, in the full import of the word, harmonious.

The same causes, and the same combination, rendered the *Task* more popular than any other poem of equal length in the English language. Its religious character, no doubt, contributed largely to its circulation, by carrying it among a numerous and growing class of readers, for whom that character constituted its chief attraction. But this was rather a powerful assistant than a primary cause of its success; which was as immediate as it was complete. Except the *Rosciad*, there had probably been no instance of a poem obtaining so rapidly a great reputation: but the *Rosciad* was written by a man of the town, who had no worthier object in view than that of producing something which might become the town talk; it was addressed to those who frequented Vanity Fair, and was not expected to have any interest beyond the precincts of that fair, nor to retain it longer than while the fair lasted: the *Task* was the work of a reflective, melancholy mind, employed in retirement upon topics in which there was no novelty, and which, it might have been thought, though they never could become obsolete, were likely to excite little attention in what is called the world. That it must one day be appreciated as it deserved, a competent reader might have pronounced without hesitation; the immediate acceptance which it obtained was what the most sanguine friend of the author could not have anticipated, nor had the author himself regarded it as a possibility in any dream of hope.

But the poem appeared—if the expression may be permitted—just at the fulness of time, when the way had been prepared for it. A taste for descriptive poetry, of which none was produced in the school of Pope and Dryden, and which professional critics had vilified and condemned, had been revived by Thomson. So little was it favored in his time, that it was long before he could find a publisher for his *Winter*, (the first part of the *Seasons* that was printed;) and when, upon Mallet's recommendation, a bookseller ventured to print it, the impression lay like waste paper in his warehouse, and was in danger of being sold as such, when one Mr. Whatley (his name deserves to be recorded) happened to take up a copy which was lying on the publisher's stall. He was a lover of poetry, and, as it appears, a man of reputation among town wits, for he brought the poem into notice by spreading its praise through the coffee-houses; and the edition was sold in consequence of the zeal with which he commended a poem good enough to bear out his commendation.

Other poets also had, in different lines, and with more or less success, introduced a taste for something different from the conventional poetry of the dominant school. Glover's *Leonidas*, though only party spirit could have extolled it as a work of genius, obtained no inconsiderable sale, and a reputation⁶⁸ which flourished for half a century. It has a place now in the two great general collections, and deserves to hold it. The author has the merit of having departed from bad models, rejected all false ornaments and tricks of style, and trusted to the dignity of his subject. And though the poem is cold and bald, stately rather than strong in its best parts, and in general rather stiff than stately, there is in its very nakedness a sort of Spartan severity that commands respect.

Another proof that the school of Pope was gradually

⁶⁸ In a letter dated May, 1737, Swift asks Pope, "Who is that Mr. Glover, who wrote the poem called *Leonidas*, which is reprinting here, and hath great vogue?" Pope's answer does not appear. "It would have been curious," says Dr. Warton, "to have known his opinion concerning a poem that is written in a taste and manner so different from his own, in a style formed on the Grecian school, and with the simplicity of an ancient."—*Essay on Pope*, p. 401.

losing its influence is, that almost every poem of any considerable length, which obtained any celebrity during the half century between Pope and Cowper, was written in blank verse. With the single exception of Falconer's *Shipwreck*, it would be in vain to look for any rhymed poem of that age, and of equal extent, which is held in equal estimation with the works of Young, Thomson, Glover, Somervile, Dyer, Akenside, and Armstrong. Johnson said truly, that "rhyme can never be spared, but when the subject is able to support itself;"⁶⁹ but he was never more mistaken, nor did he ever advance an opinion which is more directly disproved, than when he asserted that "those who hope to please must condescend to rhyme."⁷⁰

Gray and Mason are among the writers who, by raising the tone of poetry, contributed to excite a taste for something better than the school of Pope. In one of his first poems, Mason had, in a puerile fiction, ranked Chaucer, and Spenser, and Milton, below Pope, which is like comparing a garden shrub with the oaks of the forest. But he would have maintained no such absurdity in his riper years, for Mason lived to perceive and correct both his errors of opinion and his faults of style. It was something in that sickly age of tragedy to produce two such dramas as *Elfrida* and *Caractacus*; the success of which, when Colman (much to his honor) made the bold experiment of bringing them on the stage, proved that although the public had long been dieted upon trash, they could relish something of a worthier kind than *Tamerlane*, the *Revenge*, and the *Grecian Daughter*. Mason composed his plays upon an artificial model, and in a gorgeous diction, because he thought Shakspeare had precluded all hope of excellence in any other form of drama. He has ingenuously confessed that he was too much elated by popular applause; but he did not allow his judgment to be warped by supposing that what the public had applauded must necessarily be good. He learned to think that the romantic or mixed drama is that which is best suited to the English stage, and he gradually weeded his style.

⁶⁹ *Life of Milton.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The piece which he composed upon what he called "the old English model," lay by him some thirty years, and was not published till towards the close of his life. He was the only person in those days who ventured to follow our old dramatists ; for the revival of Shakspeare's plays upon the stage produced no visible effect upon contemporary playwrights. But when Garrick had made the name of Shakspeare popular, a race of Shakspearean commentators arose, who introduced a sort of taste for the books of Shakspeare's age ; and as they worked in the rubbish, buried treasures, of which they were not in search, were brought to light, for those who could understand their value. Thus, though in their cumbrous annotations, the last laborer always added more rubbish to the heaps which his predecessors had accumulated, they did good service by directing attention to our earlier literature. The very homage which they paid to Shakspeare tended to impress the multitude with an opinion of the paramount importance of his works, and a belief in excellences of which they could have no perception. They who had any books for show considered Shakspeare, from this time, as a necessary part of the furniture of their shelves. Even the Jubilee, and its after representation at the theatres, contributed to confirm this useful persuasion. Thousands who had not seen one of his plays, nor read a line of them, heard of Shakspeare, and understood that his name was one of those of which it became Englishmen to be proud.

Two works which appeared in the interval between Churchill and Cowper, promoted, beyond any others, this growth of a better taste than had prevailed for the hundred years preceding. These were Warton's *History of English Poetry*, and Percy's *Reliques*, the publication of which must form an epoch in the continuation of that history. They only who have made themselves well acquainted with the current poetry and criticism of those days, can understand or imagine how thoroughly both had been corrupted and debased. Books which are now justly regarded as among the treasures of English literature, which are the delight of the old and the young, the learned and the unlearned, the high and the low, were then spoken of with

contempt ; the Pilgrim's Progress as fit only for the ignorant and vulgar, Robinson Crusoe for children ; and if any one but an angler condescended to look in Izaak Walton,⁷¹ it must be for the sake of finding something in the book to laugh at ! And for Spenser, — if the tiresome uniformity of his measure did not render the Faery Queen insupportable, that poem would be laid down in disgust almost as soon as it was taken up, because of the filthy images and loathsome allegories with which it abounds ! These things were said, and said by those who had seated themselves in the chair of the critic, and assumed the office of directing and controlling public taste !

Even those who found some attractions in the imagery and story of this great poem, complained of its versification and its style. "It is great pity," said Oldmixon, "Spenser fell into that kind of versifying ; and very odd that, after it had been so generally and justly condemned, a poet in our time should think to acquire merit by imitating it. The ruff and the fardingale might as well be renewed in dress, as the long stanza in poetry, where the sense is fettered up in eight or ten lines." One gentleman, being indued with a spirit of perverse industry and stupid perseverance, in which if he has ever been equalled, he has assuredly never been outdone, transposed the whole of the Faery Queen into blank verse. Luckily for himself, he was prudent enough to publish only the first canto as a specimen ; the reason which he assigned for his undertaking was, that he "wished to render the poem more intelligible, having met with many persons, who, whilst they admired the imagery, invention, and sentiments of the author, did not choose to be at the pains to seek for them amongst his uncouth phrases and obsolete style" !

Yet in this stanza Thomson had composed the Castle of Indolence, and Shenstone his Schoolmistress, each being very far the best work of its author ; and the publication of Percy's Reliques gave birth to a third poem in the same delightful measure, which, though the author, failing to work

⁷¹ The Monthly Reviewers, in 1777, said, "We have sometimes amused ourselves by dipping into honest Izaak Walton's Complete Angler, merely as a *rum* book."

out his own conception, left it imperfect, will nevertheless hold its place with these, centuries hence, when time shall have winnowed the wheat in our granaries from the chaff, and purged the floor:—it was upon reading Percy's preliminary Dissertation, that Beattie conceived the intention of writing his *Minstrel*. No poem has ever given more delight to minds of a certain class, and in a certain stage of their progress, — that class a high one, and that stage perhaps the most delightful in the course of their pilgrimage. It was to this class that the poet himself belonged; the scenes which he delineated were those in which he had grown up, the feelings and aspirations those of his own boyhood and youth, and the poem derived its peculiar charm from its truth.

This was an incidental effect of Percy's volumes. Their immediate consequence was to produce a swarm of "legendary tales," bearing, in their style, about as much resemblance to the genuine ballad, as the heroes of a French tragedy to the historical personages whose names they bear, or a set of stage-dancers to the lads and lasses of a village green, in the old times of the May-pole. But they were written by persons who had been trained in a bad school, and could not unlearn the lessons they had been taught. The more tricky they were, and the more mawkish, the more they were extolled by contemporary critics; but they passed away with their generation; and it was seen in the next, how great a benefit Percy and Warton had conferred upon the young lovers and votaries of the art, by directing their attention to the early poets.

Cowper's *Task* appeared in the interval, when young minds were prepared to receive it, and at a juncture when there was no poet of any great ability or distinguished name in the field. Gray and Akenside were dead. Mason was silent. Glover, brooding over his *Athenaid*, was regarded as belonging to an age that was past. Churchill was forgotten. Emily and Bampfylde had been cut off in the blossom of their youth. Crabbe, having, by the publication of his *Library*, his *Village*, and his *Newspaper*, accomplished his heart's immediate desire, sought at that time for no further publicity; and Hayley ambled over the

course without a competitor. There never was a season at which such a poem could have appeared with more advantage ; and perhaps there never was a poem of which the immediate success, as well as the permanent estimation, might with so much certainty have been predicted. The subject, or rather the occasion of the poem, had been fortuitous ; and the key in which it was pitched, as being best suited to the theme, was precisely that which enabled the poet to exhibit the whole compass of his powers. It is remarkable that the work on which Cowper's fame is founded, should commence in a strain bearing no remote similarity to the earliest of his pieces which has been preserved. That piece was in imitation of the *Splendid Shilling* ; the present theme was not, indeed, base in itself, but it could only be treated with playful gravity, which would have lost half its effect in any other measure than blank verse ; and yet from a clear perception of its difficulties,⁷² and the facility which he had acquired of composing in rhyme, Cowper would not have fixed upon that metre for any premeditated plan. But having thus pitched it, excursive as the poem became, it enabled him to rise and fall with the subject, and, passing in easy and graceful transition

From grave to gay, from lively to severe,

give to one of the most diversified poems in the language, the tone and character of an harmonious whole.

The *Task* was at once descriptive, moral, and satirical. The descriptive parts every where bore evidence of a thoughtful mind and a gentle spirit, as well as of an observant eye ; and the moral sentiment which pervaded them, gave a charm in which descriptive poetry is often found

⁷² After the *Task* was finished, he says to Mr. Newton, "I do not mean to write blank verse again. Not having the music of rhymes, it requires so close an attention to the pause and the cadence, and such a peculiar mode of expression, as render it, to me at least, the most difficult species of poetry that I have ever meddled with." — Nov. 27, 1784.

His meaning must have related only to original composition, for he had then begun his translation. He had said before to Mr. Unwin, (Oct. 20, 1784,) "I do not intend to write any more blank verse. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition."

wanting. The best didactic poems, when compared with the Task, are like formal gardens in comparison with woodland scenery. "One of his intimate friends," says Hayley, "had written in the first volume of his poems the following passage from the younger Pliny, as descriptive of the book: — '*Multa tenuiter, multa sublimiter, multa venusté, multa teneré, multa dulciter, multa cum bile.*'" Many passages are delicate, many sublime, many beautiful, many tender, many sweet, many acrimonious. Cowper was pleased with the application, and candidly said, 'The latter part is very true indeed! Yes, yes, there are *multa cum bile.*'" ⁷³ He was in a happier state of mind, and in more cheerful circumstances, when he began the Task: it was therefore less acrimonious. Its satire is altogether free from personality; it is the satire not of a sour and discontented spirit, but of a benevolent though melancholy mind; and the melancholy was not of a kind to affect artificial gloom and midnight musings, but rather to seek and find relief in sunshine, in the beauties of nature, in books and leisure, in solitary or social walks, and in the comforts of a quiet fireside.

"What there is of a religious cast," says Cowper, "I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance; and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many poems as Lope de Vega or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience. My descriptions are all from nature; not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience; not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I varied as much as I could, (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string,) I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance; because at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed. — If the work cannot boast a regular plan, (in which respect, however, I do not think

⁷³ Vol. i. p. 261.

it altogether indefensible,) it may yet boast that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage; and that, except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency, — to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.”⁷⁴

If the world had not liked his poem, the world must have been worse than it is. But Cowper himself, perhaps, was not aware of what it was that supplied the place of plan, and with happier effect than the most skilful plan could have produced. There are no passages in a poet's works which are more carped at while he lives, than those wherein he speaks of himself; and if he has any readers after his death, there are none then which are perused with greater interest. In the *Task* there is nothing which could be carped at on that score, even by a supercilious critic, and yet the reader feels that the poet is continually present; he becomes intimately acquainted with him, and this it is which gives to this delightful poem its unity and its peculiar charm.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRANSLATION OF HOMER. LADY HESKETH COMES TO OLNEY.
REMOVAL TO THE VILLAGE OF WESTON.

In a letter to Lady Hesketh, written soon after the renewal of their correspondence, Cowper says, “Now, my dear, I am going to tell you a secret: it is a great secret, that you must not whisper even to your cat. No creature is at this moment apprized of it, but Mrs. Unwin and her son. I am making a new translation of Homer, and am on the point of finishing the twenty-first book of the *Iliad*. The reasons upon which I undertake this Herculean labor, and by which I justify an enterprise in which I seem so effectually an-

⁷⁴ To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 10, 1784.

anticipated by Pope, (although, in fact, he has not anticipated me at all,) I may possibly give you, if you wish for them, when I can find nothing more interesting to say.”¹

It appears from the same letter, that he began this translation on the 12th of November, 1784, which was as soon as he had completed his labors for the second volume of his Poems, by finishing the piece entitled *Tirocinium*. So much as a week could not have elapsed between the completion of one undertaking, and the commencement of this most laborious of his works. But he had now learned the art of self-management, and was able steadily to practise it; he knew how necessary it was to have some regular employment which should occupy his mind, without exciting it.

Some pleasure he took in surprising his friends with his productions, but he had further motives for reticence in this case. “Till I had made,” he says, “such a progress in my present undertaking as to put it out of all doubt, that, if I lived, I should proceed in and finish it, I kept the matter to myself. It would have done me little honor to have told my friends that I had an arduous enterprise in hand, if afterwards I must have told them that I had dropped it.”² Few men, however, would have been better warranted by experience in relying upon their own perseverance. “Tully’s rule, ‘*Nulla dies sine linea*,’” said he, “will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhered to it so rigidly, (in composing the *Task*,) that though more than once I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote; and finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another.”³ He had worked at it sometimes an hour a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes two hours.⁴ But his translation was performed by piece-work; he set himself forty lines⁵ for his daily task, and

¹ Nov. 9, 1785.

² To Mr. Hill, Dec. 24, 1785.

³ To Mr. Newton, Nov. 27, 1784.

⁴ Oct. 30, 1784.

⁵ Twice the length of an ordinary imposition at Westminster, with the additional difference of translating into blank verse instead of literal prose. Some of my readers will call to mind, as I do, the look, and the tone of voice, and the movement of the head, with which Dr. Vincent used to pronounce his ordinary morning sentence of “twenty lines of Homer, and not go to breakfast.”

never excused himself from that task when it was possible to perform it. "Equally sedulous," said he, "I am in the matter of transcribing, so that between both, my morning and evening are most part completely engaged."⁶

Of all books which are used in schools, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are those which are read with most pleasure, and consequently make the deepest impression upon a boy's imagination; and this is less because the boy does not begin to read them consecutively till they have become easy to him, and he is of an age to enter into their spirit, than because of their intrinsic interest, the perfect beauty of their style, and the charm of truth and nature in which they incomparably excel all other poems of their kind. "John," says Cowper, in a playful message⁷ to one of his friend Unwin's sons, "John, once the Little, but now almost the Great, and promising to be altogether such in time, make yourself master of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey* as soon as you can; and then you will be master of the two finest poems that ever were composed by man, and composed in the finest language that ever man uttered. All languages of which I know any thing, are gibberish compared with Greek."

It has already been mentioned⁸ that Cowper went through both the Homeric Poems at Westminster, with a chosen companion, who was as capable as himself of enjoying them; and that he had read them critically in the Temple, comparing them with Pope's translation as he proceeded. His love and admiration of the original had increased in proportion to his distaste of a version which so thoroughly disguises it; and it was the vivid remembrance of those feelings, quickened by the continual pleasure which he found in perusing the *Iliad*, that induced him to undertake the arduous task of translating it himself. The distrust which he felt at first of his own perseverance, gave way when he approached the end of the *Iliad*. "I shall assuredly proceed," said he, "because the farther I go, the more I find myself justified in the undertaking; and in due time, if I live, I shall assuredly publish. In the whole I shall have composed above forty thousand verses, about which forty thousand verses I shall

⁶ To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1785.

⁷ June 12, 1785.

⁸ Vol. i. p. 79.

have taken great pains, on no occasion suffering a slovenly line to escape me. I leave you to guess, therefore, whether, such a labor once achieved, I shall not determine to turn it to some account, and to give myself profit if I can, if not at least some credit, for my reward.”⁹ Accordingly he took measures for making his intention known among his friends, and preparing the public for it.

This resolution he announced to Lady Hesketh. “Although,” said he, “I do not suspect that a secret to you, my cousin, is any burden, yet having maturely considered that point since I wrote my last, I feel myself altogether disposed to release you from the injunction, to that effect, under which I laid you. I have now made such a progress in my translation, that I need neither fear I shall stop short of the end, nor that any other rider of Pegasus should overtake me. Therefore, if at any time it should fall fairly in your way, or you should feel yourself invited to say I am so occupied, you have my poetship’s free permission.”¹⁰ He did not like the booksellers well enough, he said, to make them a present of such a labor, and he intended to publish by subscription. His cousin had offered him pecuniary assistance for his next publication, whatever it might be ; he asked her on this occasion for her vote and interest, if she pleased, but nothing more.

In communicating his purpose to Mr. Newton,¹¹ he related in what manner he had imperceptibly, as it were, engaged in so arduous an undertaking. “Employment, and with the pen,” said he, “is, through habit, become essential to my well-being ; and to produce always original poems, especially of considerable length, is not so easy. For some weeks after I had finished the Task, and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the Iliad ; and merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception¹² of what I was then enter-

⁹ To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1785.

¹⁰ Hayley, vol. ii. p. 143. The letter is without a date.

¹¹ Dec. 3, 1785.

¹² This shows, what indeed might be inferred from other circum-

ing upon, than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient, and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work ; till at last I began to reflect thus : — The Iliad and the Odyssey together consist of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer ; and, though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with whom no man can disgrace himself. The literati are all agreed to a man, that, although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try, therefore, whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failings, which, like so many buoys upon a dangerous coast, will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These, and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a vacuum as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work, that ere long I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing so. I have connections, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that a brisk circulation may be procured ; and if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it. It is a business such as it will not, indeed, lie much in your way to promote ; but, among your numerous connections, it is possible that you may know some who would sufficiently interest themselves in such a

stances, that Hayley was mistaken (vol. i. 265) in ascribing to Lady Austen the suggestion of this work.

work to be not unwilling to subscribe to it. I do not mean — far be it from me — to put you upon making hazardous applications, where you might possibly incur a refusal, that would give you though but a moment's pain. You know best your own opportunities and powers in such a cause. If you can do but little, I shall esteem it much ; and if you can do nothing, I am sure that it will not be for want of a will."

Cowper availed himself of the Gentleman's Magazine to produce upon the readers of that always respectable journal an impression favorable for his design. Addressing a letter to the immortal Mr. Urban, he began by saying that a lady of fine understanding and taste, and conversant with our best writers, had recently perused Pope's Homer, which she had not looked into for many years before ; and on finishing the perusal, she had asked his opinion of it, expressing at the same time no small degree of disappointment, and some suspicion that prejudice had operated not a little in favor of the original. "For my own part," said he, "I have ever been among the warmest admirers of the Grecian, whose works, in my mind, in point of variety and sublimity of conception, and dignity of expression, remain to this day unrivalled. I accordingly felt myself a little piqued at her insinuation ; and having, some years since, made an accurate comparison of Pope with Homer, throughout both his poems, I with the more confidence addressed myself to the task of his vindication : and not doubting that most English readers must of necessity have conceived of him infinitely below his worth, I beg leave, through the medium of your Magazine, to give my sentiments upon the subject a more extensive circulation than they can otherwise have. I feel a double pleasure in doing it. I consider it not only as an opportunity to assert the honor of my favorite bard, but the good sense and justice of their suffrages also who have crowned him with such abundant applause as my female friend finds it difficult to account for."

Giving then to Pope his praise as a poet, in whose original works he found every species of poetical merit, he proceeded to account for the faults of his translation. "Fame,"

he said, "had not been his principal motive, otherwise, with his abilities, he would never have condescended to let others participate in the undertaking. His connections were many, his avocations were frequent; he was obliged to have recourse to assistance; sometimes to write hastily and rather carelessly himself; and often, no doubt, either through delicacy or precipitance, to admit such lines of his coadjutors, as not only dishonored Homer, but his translator also." The main cause, however, lay in the measure which he had chosen. "Pope was a most excellent rhymist; that is to say, he had the happiest talent at accommodating his sense to his rhyming occasions. To discover homotonous words in a language abounding with them, like ours, is a task that would puzzle no man competently acquainted with it. But for such accommodation as I have mentioned, when an author is to be translated, there is little room; the sense is already determined; rhyme, therefore, must, in many cases, occasion, even to the most expert in the art, an almost unavoidable necessity to depart from the meaning of the original; for Butler's remark is as true as it is ludicrous, that

— Rhyme the rudder is of verses,
With which, like ships, they steer their courses.

Accordingly, in numberless instances, we may observe in Pope a violation of Homer's sense, of which he certainly had never been guilty, had not the chains with which he had bound himself constrained him."

The letter-writer treated next upon the barbarous effect of shortening proper names; "blank verse," he observed, "being of loftier construction, would have afforded sufficient room for Idomeneus and Meriones, with several others, to have stood upright, — instead of being shortened by the foot. "But rhyme has another unhappy effect upon a poem of such length; it admits not of a sufficient variety in the pause and cadence. The ear is fatigued with the sameness of the numbers, and satiated with a tune, musical indeed, but forever repeated. Here, then, was an error in the outset. It is to be lamented, but not to be wondered at. For who can wonder, since all men are naturally fond

of that in which they excel, that Pope, who managed the bells of rhyme with more dexterity than any man, should have tied them about Homer's neck? Yet Pope, when he composed an epic poem himself, wrote it in blank verse, aware, no doubt, of its greater suitableness, both in point of dignity and variety, to the grandeur of such a work. And though Atterbury advised him to burn it, and it was burned accordingly, I will venture to say that it did not incur that doom by the want of rhyme. It is hardly necessary for me to add, after what I have said on this part of the subject, that Homer must have suffered infinitely in the English representation that we have of him. Sometimes his sense is suppressed, sometimes other sense is obtruded upon him; rhyme gives the word, a miserable transformation ensues; instead of Homer in the graceful habit of his age and nation, we have Homer in a straight waistcoat.

"The spirit and the manner of an author are terms that may, I think, be used conversely. The spirit gives birth to the manner, and the manner is an indication of the spirit. Homer's spirit was manly, bold, sublime. Superior to the practice of those little arts by which a genius like Ovid's seeks to amuse his readers, he contented himself with speaking the thing as it was, deriving a dignity from his plainness, to which writers more studious of ornament can never attain. If you meet with a metaphorical expression in Homer, you meet with a rarity indeed. I do not say that he has none, but I assert that he has very few. Scriptural poetry excepted, I believe that there is not to be found in the world poetry so simple as his. Is it thus with his translator? I answer, no; but exactly the reverse. Pope is no where more figurative in his own pieces than in his translation of Homer. I do not deny that his flowers are beautiful, at least they are often such; but they are modern discoveries, and of English growth. The Iliad and the Odyssey, in his hands, have no more of the air of antiquity than if he had himself invented them. Their simplicity is overwhelmed with a profusion of fine things, which, however they may strike the eye at first sight, make no amends for the greater beauties which they conceal. The venerable Grecian is as much

the worse for his acquisitions of this kind, as a statue by Phidias or Praxiteles would be for the painter's brush. The man might give to it the fashionable colors of the day, the color of the Emperor's eye, or of the hair of the Queen of France, but he would fill up those fine strokes of the artist which he designed should be the admiration of all future ages."

He then adduced instances in which Pope had injured the original by loading it with false ornaments, or weakened it by false delicacy, occasioning thereby "a flatness in the English Homer, that never occurs in the Greek. Homer's heroes," said he, "respected their gods just as much as the Papists respect their idols. While their own cause prospered, they were a very good sort of gods; but a reverse of fortune taking place, they treated them with a familiarity nothing short of blasphemy. These outrages Pope has diluted with such a proportion of good Christian meekness, that all the spirit of the old bard is quenched entirely. In like manner the invective of his heroes is often soothed and tamed away so effectually, that, instead of the smartness and acrimony of the original, we find nothing but the milkiness of the best good manners. In nice discrimination of character Homer is excelled by none; but his translator makes the persons of his poems speak all one language; they are all alike stately, pompous, stiff. In Homer we find accuracy without littleness, ease without negligence, grandeur without ostentation, sublimity without labor. I do not find them in Pope. He is often turgid, often tame, often careless, and — to what cause it was owing I will not even surmise — upon many occasions has given an interpretation of whole passages utterly beside their meaning.

"If my fair countrywomen," he concluded, "will give a stranger credit for so much intelligence, novel at least to them, they will know hereafter whom they have to thank for the weariness with which many of them have toiled through Homer; they may rest assured that the learned, the judicious, the polite scholars of all nations have not been, to a man, mistaken and deceived; but that Homer, whatever figure he may make in English, is in himself entitled

to the highest praise that his most sanguine admirers have bestowed upon him."

The letter was signed Alethes.¹³ In the next number of the Magazine the editor introduced a citation from Say's Essays, wherein Pope's version of the passage describing in a simile a moonlight night, was critically examined—a passage which, being one of the very worst in the whole translation, as equally false to the original and to nature, is that which has been most praised. "I may, therefore, reasonably conclude," says Cowper,¹⁴ "that Nichols, who makes the quotation, is on my side also. I do not know that Pope's work was ever more roughly handled than by myself, upon this occasion; yet, although the Magazine be a field in which disputants upon all questions contend, no one has hitherto enlisted himself in Pope's behalf against me. The truth is, that in those points where I touched him, he is indefensible. Readers of the original know it; and all others must be conscious that whether he deserves my censure, or deserves it not, the matter is not for them to meddle with."

But though Cowper delivered his opinion thus freely in his letters, and under a fictitious signature in the Magazine, he was prudent enough not to provoke hostility in his Proposals. "I did," said he to Hill,¹⁵ "as you suppose, bestow all possible consideration on the subject of an apology for my Homerican undertaking. I turned the matter about in my mind a hundred different ways, and in every way in which it would present itself, found it an impracticable business. It is impossible for me, with what delicacy soever I may manage it, to state the objections that lie against Pope's translation, without incurring odium and the imputation of arrogance; foreseeing this danger, I choose to say nothing."

Upon imparting his intention to Johnson, and asking his advice and information on the subject of proposals for a subscription, the bookseller in reply¹⁶ disapproved of the

¹³ Gentleman's Magazine, Aug. 1785. It is printed also among the Selections from that Magazine, vol. ii. pp. 273—8.

¹⁴ To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1786.

¹⁵ April 5, 1786.

¹⁶ Dr. Johnson would have agreed in opinion with his namesake, "He," said he, "that asks subscription soon finds that he has enemies,

intended mode, and offered to treat with him, adding that he could make offers which he thought would be approved. Cowper, however, persisted in his intention. "A subscription," said he, "is surely on every account the most eligible mode of publication. When I shall have emptied the purses of my friends, and of their friends, into my own, I am still free to levy contributions upon the world at large, and I shall then have a fund to defray the expenses of a new edition."¹⁷ He had already received great encouragement at his outset. "At Westminster," said he to Lady Hesketh,¹⁸ "I was much intimate with Walter Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot. In the course, as I suppose, of more than twenty years after we left school, I saw him but twice; once when I called on him at Oxford, and once when he called on me in the Temple. He has a brother who lives about four miles from hence, a man of large estate. It happened that soon after the publication of my first volume, he came into this country on a visit to his brother. Having read my book, and liking it, he took that opportunity to renew his acquaintance with me. I felt much affection for him; and the more, because it was plain, that after so long a time, he still retained his for me. He is now at his brother's; twice he visited me in the course of last week, and this morning he brought Mrs. Bagot with him. He is a good and amiable man, and she a most agreeable woman. At this second visit I made him acquainted with my translation of Homer; he was highly pleased to find me so occupied, and with all that glow of friendship that would make it criminal in me to doubt his sincerity for a moment, insisted upon being employed in promoting the subscription, and engaged himself and all his connections, which are extensive, and many of them of high rank, in my service. His chariot put up at an inn in the town while he was here, and I rather wondered that at his departure he chose to

All who do not encourage him, defame him. He that wants money will rather be thought angry than poor; and he that wishes to save his money conceals his avarice by his malice." — *Life of Pope*.

This is looking at the dark side, — and in a matter wherein enmity can do little, and good will may effect much.

¹⁷ To Lady Hesketh, Jan 10, 1786.

¹⁸ Nov. 30, 1785.

walk to his chariot, and not to be taken up at the door. But when he had been gone about a quarter of an hour, his servant came with a letter, which his master had written at the inn, and which, he said, required no answer. I opened it, and found as follows : —

MY GOOD FRIEND,

Olney, Nov. 30, 1785.

You will oblige me by accepting this early subscription to your Homer, even before you have fixed your plan and price ; which when you have done, if you will send me a parcel of your subscription papers, I will endeavor to circulate them among my friends and acquaintance as far as I can. Health and happiness attend you.

Yours ever,

WALTER BAGOT.

It contained a draft for £20.

"I meet," said he, in another letter,¹⁹ "with encouragement from all quarters ; such as I find need of, indeed, in an enterprise of such length and moment, but such as at the same time I find effectual. Homer is not a poet to be translated under the disadvantage of doubts and dejection." The bookseller, having offered his opinion, did not persist in it when he saw that Cowper had made up his mind, with reasonable expectation of success. Cowper was in good spirits at the prospect. "Johnson," said he, "behaves very well, at least according to my conception of the matter, and seems sensible that I have dealt liberally with him. He wishes me to be a gainer by my labors—in his own words, 'to put something handsome into my pocket,' and recommends two large quartos for the whole. 'He would not,' he says, 'by any means advise an extravagant price,' and has fixed it at three guineas ; the half, as usual, to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. 'Five hundred names,' he adds, 'at this price, will put about a thousand pounds into my purse.' I am doing my best to obtain them. I have written, I think, to all my quondam friends, except those that are dead, requiring

¹⁹ To Mr. Unwin, Dec. 24, 1781.

their assistance. I have gulped and swallowed, and I have written to the Chancellor, and I have written to Colman. I now bring them both to a fair test. They can both serve me most materially, if so disposed." ²⁰ His angry feelings towards Thurlow and Colman passed away when he had given them vent in verse; and in the case of the latter, it appears by his letter ²¹ to him that he had received sufficient assurance of friendly recollections.

DEAR COLMAN,

For though we have not had any intercourse for more than twenty years, I cannot find in my heart to address you by any other style,—and I am the rather encouraged to the use of that in which I formerly addressed you, by a piece of intelligence that I received not long since from my friend Hill, who told me that you had inquired after me of him, and had said something about an intention to write to me. I took pretty good care that you should not be ignorant of my having commenced author, by sending you my volume. The reason why I did not send you my second was because you omitted to send me your *Art of Poetry*, which in a splenetic mood, I suppose, I construed into a prohibition. But Hill's subsequent information has cured me of that malady, as far as you were concerned.

Once an author, and always an author: this you know, my friend, is an axiom, and admits of no dispute. In my instance, at least, it is likely to hold good, for I have more leisure than it is possible to dispose of without writing. Accordingly I write every day, and have every day been writing, since I last published, till at last I have made such a progress in a new translation of Homer into blank verse, that I am upon the point of publishing again. Hitherto I

²⁰ To Mr. Unwin, Dec. 31, 1785.

²¹ For this letter I am obliged to Mr. Russell, who edited the works of the English Reformers Tyndale and Frith. The discontinuance of a design which was to have comprised the writings of all the most eminent English and Scottish reformers, is much to be regretted. It was caused by the Religious Tract Society's commencing an abridged series of their writings, and thereby compelling the publisher to desist from an undertaking which would have rendered great service to philologists and historians, as well as to ecclesiastical students. To either of these classes abridgments are worth nothing.

have given away my copies : but having indulged myself in that frolic twice, I now mean to try whether it may not prove equally agreeable to get something by the bargain. I come, therefore, humbly to solicit your vote and interest, and to beg that you will help me in the circulation of my Proposals, for I shall publish by subscription. On such occasions, you know, a man sets every wheel in motion ; and it would be strange indeed, if, not having a great many wheels to move, I should leave unattempted so important a one as yourself. As soon as I have your permission, I shall order my bookseller to send you some papers.

The news informed me of your illness, which gave me true concern, for time alone cannot efface the traces of such a friendship as I have felt for you,—no, nor even time with distance to help it. The news also told me that you were better ; but to find that you are perfectly recovered, and to see it under your own hand, will give the greatest pleasure to one who can honestly subscribe himself to this day,

Your very affectionate,

Dec. 27, 1785, Olney, Bucks.

WM. COWPER.

I enclose this with a letter to Johnson, my publisher, to whom I am obliged to have recourse for your address.

In reply to this he received, in his own words, “ the most affectionate letter imaginable. Colman,” he says, “ writes to me like a brother.”²²

Perhaps no work of equal magnitude was ever commenced with so little preparation ;— except the course of his former studies, indeed, there had been none. It does not appear that he ever saw any other translation than Pope’s ; and so entirely unprovided was he with books, that he translated the whole Iliad²³ with no other help than a

²² To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 31, 1786.

²³ It must be remembered, that there was probably no other book with which Cowper was so thoroughly familiar. Johnson, after saying, “ It is not very likely that Pope overflowed with Greek,” justly observes, that “ minute inquiries into the force of words are less necessary in translating Homer than other poets, because his positions are general, and his representations natural, with very little dependence on local or temporary customs,— on those changeable scenes of artificial life, which, by mingling original with accidental notions, and crowding the

Clavis.²⁴ But he "equipped himself better for this immense journey" when he revised the work — a task which was performed with so much diligence, that the first copy bore very little resemblance to the second all the way through. "You must not," said he, "imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth, I had not; but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to, both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed, if it does not call loud for a second."

Transcribing was, of all occupations, that which Cowper disliked the most; he called it "slavish work." He had no such dislike to the business of revising and correcting his verses; of this, indeed, he was never weary in his translation, except when he was called upon to alter anything upon the suggestion of another person; then, indeed, it became the most irksome of all employments. A gentleman, whom Mr. Unwin wished to become a subscriber, desired to see a specimen of the version. "I thank you," said Cowper to his friend,²⁵ "for all that you have said and done in my cause, and beforehand for all that you shall say and do hereafter. I am sure that there will be no deficiency on your part. In particular, I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honor and respectability when the *Mann* you mentioned applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples; but of verse, never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed." This, however, was more lively than considerately said, and it was not long before he thought it prudent to depart from such a resolution.

mind with images which time effaces, produce ambiguity in diction, and obscurity in books. To this open display of unadulterated nature it must be ascribed, that Homer has fewer passages of doubtful meaning than any other poet either in the learned or in modern languages. I have read of a man who, being, by his ignorance of Greek, compelled to gratify his curiosity with the Latin printed on the opposite page, declared that, from the rude simplicity of the lines literally rendered, he formed nobler ideas of the Homeric majesty, than from the labored elegance of polished versions."—*Life of Pope*.

²⁴ To Mr. Hill, April 5, 1786.

²⁵ Dec. 31, 1785.

Lady Hesketh had been the means of renewing the communication between Cowper and their kinsman, the General. For this purpose she made use of her cousin's works. "You did perfectly well, my dear," said Cowper, "to make Task take the lead of his elder brother, when their attendance on the General was in question. The first volume is a Confession of my Faith, concerning which he will probably not feel himself greatly interested; but the second, giving some account of my manner of life, together with other diverting matters, may possibly please him. I shall be glad if it should, for I know him to be a man of excellent taste; but at the same time do not expect him to say much." By her advice Cowper wrote to the General, being assured²⁶ by her that through all their years of estrangement he had never withdrawn his pecuniary assistance. The letter, though "of pretty handsome length," merely contained an explanation of his motives for undertaking the translation, and an application for his interest in procuring subscribers. The General wished to have a specimen sent him. Cowper, remembering how scornfully he had rejected a former application of the same purport, declined at first; but presently repented, and blamed himself the more when Lady Hesketh sent him a copy of the General's note to her, of which he and his publication were the chief subject, and in which his kindness was strongly expressed.

The fault was soon repaired, and he apologized for it thus to his "dearest cousin:"²⁷ "To tell you the truth, I began to be ashamed of myself that I had opposed him in the only two measures he recommended, and then assured him that I should be glad of his advice at all times. Having put myself under a course of strict self-examination upon this subject, I found at last that all the reluctance I had felt against a compliance with his wishes proceeded from a principle of shamefacedness at bottom, that had insensibly influenced my reasonings, and determined me against the counsel of a man whom I knew to be wiser than myself. Wonderful as it may seem, my cousin, yet is it equally true, that although I certainly did translate the Iliad with a

²⁶ See vol. i. p. 134.

²⁷ Jan. 16, 1786.

design to publish it when I had done, and although I have twice issued from the press already, yet do I tremble at the thought, and so tremble at it, that I could not bear to send out a specimen, because, by doing so, I should appear in public a good deal sooner than I had purposed. Thus have I developed my whole heart to you, and if you should think it at all expedient, have not the least objection to your communicating to the General this interpretation of the matter. — I am vexed, and have been these three days, that I thwarted him; but, as I told you, I have still my gloomy hours, which had their share, together with the more powerful cause assigned above, in determining my behavior. But I have given the best proof possible of my repentance."

The portion which he selected was part of the interview between Priam and Achilles, in the last book. "I chose," said he, "to extract from the latter end of the poem, and as near to the close of it as possible, that I might encourage a hope in the readers of it, that if they found it in some degree worthy of their approbation, they would find the former part of the work not less so; for if a writer flags any where, it must be when he is near the end."²⁸ Thus it is that authors are sometimes apt to refine upon the effect which their compositions may produce upon the readers, not considering how little consideration they themselves bestow upon things in which they have no particular interest.

"The General and I," said he to Lady Hesketh, "having broken the ice, are upon the most comfortable terms of correspondence. He writes very affectionately to me, and I say every thing to him that comes uppermost. I could not write frequently to any creature living, upon any other terms than these. He tells me of infirmities that he has, which make him less active than he was; I am sorry to hear that he has any such. Alas! alas! he was young when I saw him, only twenty years ago!"²⁹ Cowper had reached that time of life, in which, upon looking back, twenty years seem but as yesterday.

He was not inclined to submit his manuscript to any

²⁸ To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 15, 1786.

²⁹ Jan. 31, 1786.

one for criticism, having felt the inconvenience in the case of his first volume. When Lady Hesketh advised such a measure, he replied, "My cousin, give yourself no trouble to find out any of the Magi to scrutinize my Homer. I can do without them; and if I were not conscious that I have no need of their help, I would be the first to call for it." Johnson, however, when the specimen, which had been sent to the General, came to his hands on its return, sent with it some notes thereon by a critic, whose name he did not mention, but to whom, as a man of unquestionable learning and ability, he, and the General also, wished Cowper to submit his manuscript. Pleased with the knowledge and sagacity which the remarks displayed, and not displeased with their temper, though it promised that severity of animadversion would not be spared when occasion should be found for it, he consented to let the manuscript be submitted to this unknown critic. And being in a complying mood, he assented also to Lady Hesketh's desire, that Maty should see one of the books; Maty had asked her leave to mention it in the next number of his Review, in which he was about to express his approbation of the Task. "This," said Cowper, "pleases me the more, because I have authentic intelligence of his being a critical character in all its forms — acute, sour, and blunt; and so incorruptible withal, and so unsusceptible of bias from undue motives, that, as my correspondent informs me, he would not praise his own mother, did he not think she deserved it."³⁰

"But let Maty," said he, "be the only *critic* that has any thing to do with it. The vexation, the perplexity that attends a multiplicity of criticisms by various hands, many of which are sure to be futile, many of them ill-founded, and some of them contradictory to others, is inconceivable, — except by the author, whose ill-fated work happens to be the subject of them. This also appears to me self-evident, that if a work have passed under the review of one man of taste and learning, and have had the good fortune to please him, his approbation gives security for that of all others qualified like himself. I speak thus, my dear, after

³⁰ To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 23, 1786.

having just escaped from such a storm of trouble, occasioned by endless remarks, hints, suggestions, and objections, as drove me almost to despair, and to the very verge of a resolution to drop my undertaking forever. With infinite difficulty I at last sifted the chaff from the wheat, availed myself of what appeared to me to be just, and rejected the rest, but not till the labor and anxiety had nearly undone all that Kerr had been doing for me. My beloved cousin, trust me for it, as you safely may, that temper, vanity, and self-importance, had nothing to do in all this distress that I suffered. It was merely the effect of an alarm that I could not help taking, when I compared the great trouble I had with a few lines only thus handled, with that which I foresaw such handling of the whole must necessarily give me. I felt beforehand, that my constitution would not bear it."

Johnson's friend proved to be Fuseli; and Cowper, though at first sadly teased by him, soon, when they understood each other, saw reason to think that he might have gone the world through before he could have found his equal in an accurate and familiar acquaintance with the original. Fuseli, though the most caustic of men, was greatly pleased with the translation, and it is said to have derived considerable advantage from his remarks. But Maty, not a little to the vexation and surprise of Lady Hesketh, declared against it, and Cowper was hurt by his animadversions; they appeared to him unjust in part, and in part ill-natured; "and yet," says he, "the man himself being an oracle in every body's account, I apprehended that he had done me much mischief. Why he says that the translation is far from exact, is best known to himself, for I know it to be as exact as is compatible with poetry; and prose translations of Homer are not wanted."³¹ Colman also made some remarks upon the specimen, "prompted," said he, "by my zeal for your success, not, Heaven knows, by arrogance or impertinence. — On the whole I admire it exceedingly, thinking it breathes the spirit and conveys the manner of the original; though, having here neither Homer nor Pope's Homer, I cannot speak precisely of particular

³¹ May 8, 1786.

lines or expressions, or compare your blank verse with his rhyme, except by declaring, that I think blank verse infinitely more congenial to the magnificent simplicity of Homer's hexameters, than the confined couplets and the jingle of rhyme."

Colman had shown himself in his Terence so excellent a translator, that there was no man, whose opinion upon such a specimen could be worth more. It came in good time to encourage Cowper, who had been harassed by minute criticisms, and had "altered and altered in deference to them, till at last he did not care how he altered." "When you come, my dear," said he to his cousin, "we will hang all these critics together, for they have worried me without remorse or conscience, — at least one of them has. I had actually murdered more than a few of the best lines in the specimen, in compliance with his requisitions; but plucked up my courage at last, and, in the very last opportunity that I had, recovered them to life again by restoring the original reading. At the same time, I readily confess that the specimen is the better for all this discipline its author has undergone; but then it has been more indebted for its improvement to that pointed accuracy of examination to which I was myself excited, than to any proposed amendments from Mr. Critic; for as sure as you are my cousin, whom I long to see at Olney, so surely would he have done me irreparable mischief, if I would have given him leave."³²

Cowper was sufficiently aware of his own state, to know that the sort of excitement which he thus underwent in his way to the press, must appear dangerous to his relations, and that there was one of his letters to the General that would distress and alarm him. "I sent him another," he says, "that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures, and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that I doubt not we shall jog on merrily together." Fuseli no doubt was made acquainted with Cowper's case, and tempered his strictures accordingly. It was fortunate that Mr.

³² Feb. 19, 1786.

Newton,³³ who neither thought favorably of the undertaking, nor of the execution, had prudence enough to see that some such employment was necessary for his poor friend, and therefore did not discourage him. And it is observable, that though Cowper was not aware of Mr. Newton's opinion on the subject, he wrote to him in a strain that seems intended to propitiate him. "I thank you heartily both for your wishes and prayers, that should a disappointment occur, I may not be too much hurt by it. Strange as it may seem to say it, and unwilling as I should be to say it to any person less candid than yourself, I will nevertheless say, that I have not entered on this work, unconnected as it must needs appear with the interests of the cause of God, without the direction of his providence, nor altogether unassisted by him in the performance of it. Time will show to what it ultimately tends. I am inclined to believe that it has a tendency to which I myself am, at present, perfectly a stranger. Be that as it may, He knows my frame, and will consider that I am but dust; dust, into the bargain, that has been so trampled under foot and beaten, that a storm less violent than an unsuccessful issue of such a business might occasion, would be sufficient to blow me quite away. But I will tell you honestly, I have no fears upon the subject. My predecessor has given me every advantage.

³³ When the work was on the point of publication, he wrote thus to Hannah More:—"My dear friend's Homer is coming abroad. I have received my copy, but the *publication* is not yet. I have cursorily surveyed the first volume; it seems fully equal to what I expected, for my expectations were not high. I do not think it will add to the reputation of the author of the Task, as a poet; but I hope the *performances* will not be unworthy of him, though the *subject* is greatly beneath the attention of the writer, who has a mind capable of original, great, and useful things; but he could not at the time fix his thoughts upon any thing better; and they who know his state will rather pity than blame him. I hope we shall have no more translations."—*Roberts's Life of H. More*, vol. ii. p. 264.

Mrs. More agreed in opinion with him. She says, "You know my admiration of this truly great genius, but I am really grieved that he should lower his aims so far as to stoop to become a mere editor and translator. It is Ulysses shooting from a baby's bow. Why does he quit the heights of Solyma for the dreams of Pindus? 'What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?' In his own original way he has few competitors; in his new walk he has many superiors; he can do the best things better than any man, but others can do middling things better than he."—*Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 289.

"As I know not to what end this my present occupation may finally lead, so neither did I know, when I wrote it, or at all suspect, one valuable end, at least, that was to be answered by the Task. It has pleased God to prosper it; and being composed in blank verse, it is likely to prove as seasonable an introduction to a blank verse Homer, by the same hand, as any that could have been devised; yet when I wrote the last line of the Task, I as little suspected that I should ever engage in a version of the old Asiatic tale, as you do now." ³⁴

There was another subject, however, upon which Mr. Newton did not observe the same delicacy. Cowper had told him that he expected a visit from the General as soon as the season should turn up bright and warm. "I have not seen him," said he, "these twenty years and upwards; but our intercourse, having been lately revived, is likely to become closer, warmer, and more intimate than ever. Lady Hesketh also comes down in June, and if she can be accommodated with any thing in the shape of a dwelling at Olney, talks of making it always, in part, her summer habitation. It has pleased God that I should, like Joseph, be put into a well; and because there are no Midianites in the way to deliver me, therefore my friends are coming down into the well to see me." ³⁵ The tenor of Mr. Newton's remarks upon this intelligence may be understood from Cowper's letter in reply.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

May 20, 1786.

Within this hour arrived three sets of your new publication, ³⁶ for which we sincerely thank you. We have breakfasted since they came, and consequently, as you may suppose, have neither of us had yet an opportunity to make ourselves acquainted with the contents. I shall be happy (and when I say that, I mean to be understood in the fullest and most emphatical sense of the word) if my frame of mind shall be such as may permit me to study them. But Adam's approach to the Tree of Life, after he had sinned,

³⁴ Feb 18, 1786.³⁵ April 1, 1786.³⁶ Messiah.

was not more effectually prohibited by the flaming sword that turned every way, than mine to his great Antetype has been now almost these thirteen years, a short interval of three or four days, which passed about this time twelve-month, alone excepted. For what reason it is that I am thus long excluded, if I am ever again to be admitted, is known to God only. I can say but this; that if he is still my Father, his paternal severity has, toward me, been such as that I have reason to account it unexampled. For though others have suffered desertion, yet few, I believe, for so long a time, and perhaps none a desertion accompanied with such experiences. But they have this belonging to them; that as they are not fit for recital, being made up merely of infernal ingredients, so neither are they susceptible of it; for I know no language in which they could be expressed. They are as truly things which it is not possible for man to utter, as those were which Paul heard and saw in the Third Heaven. If the ladder of Christian experience reaches, as I suppose it does, to the very presence of God, it has nevertheless its foot in the abyss. And if Paul stood, as no doubt he did, in that experience of his to which I have just alluded, on the topmost round of it, I have been standing, and still stand, on the lowest, in this thirteenth year that has passed since I descended. In such a situation of mind, encompassed by the midnight of absolute despair, and a thousand times filled with unspeakable horror, I first commenced an author. Distress drove me to it; and the impossibility of subsisting without some employment, still recommends it. I am not, indeed, so perfectly hopeless as I was; but I am equally in need of an occupation, being often as much, and sometimes even more, worried than ever. I cannot amuse myself, as I once could, with carpenters' or with gardeners' tools, or with squirrels and guinea-pigs. At that time I was a child. But since it has pleased God, whatever else he withholds, to restore to me a man's mind, I have put away childish things. Thus far, therefore, it is plain that I have not chosen or prescribed to myself my own way, but have been providentially led to it; perhaps I might say, with equal propriety, compelled and scourged into it; for certainly, could I have made my choice, or were I permitted

to make it even now, those hours which I spend in poetry I would spend with God. But it is evidently his will that I should spend them as I do, because every other way of employing them he himself continues to make impossible. If, in the course of such an occupation, or by inevitable consequence of it, either my former connections are revived, or new ones occur, these things are as much a part of the dispensation as the leading points of it themselves ; the effect, as much as the cause. If his purposes in thus directing me are gracious, he will take care to prove them such in the issue ; and, in the mean time, will preserve me (for he is as able to do that in one condition of life as in another) from all mistakes in conduct that might prove pernicious to myself, or give reasonable offence to others. I can say it as truly as it was ever spoken,— Here I am: let him do with me as seemeth him good.

At present, however, I have no connections, at which either you, I trust, or any who love me and wish me well, have occasion to conceive alarm. Much kindness, indeed, I have experienced at the hands of several, some of them near relations, others not related to me at all ; but I do not know that there is among them a single person from whom I am likely to catch contamination. I can say of them all, with more truth than Jacob uttered when he called kid venison, "The Lord thy God brought them unto me." I could show you among them two men, whose lives, though they have but little of what we call evangelical light, are ornaments to a Christian country ; men who fear God more than some who even profess to love him. But I will not particularize farther on such a subject. Be they what they may, our situations are so distant, and we are likely to meet so seldom, that were they, as they are not, persons even of exceptionable manners, their manners would have little to do with me. We correspond, at present, only on the subject of what passed at Troy three thousand years ago ; and they are matters that, if they can do no good, will at least hurt nobody.

Your friendship for me, and the proof that I see of it in your friendly concern for my welfare on this occasion, demanded that I should be explicit. Assure yourself that I

love and honor you, as upon all accounts, so especially for the interest that you take, and have ever taken, in my welfare, most sincerely. I wish you all happiness in your new abode, all possible success in your ministry, and much fruit of your newly-published labors ; and am, with Mrs. Unwin's love to yourself and Mrs. Newton,

Most affectionately yours,

My dear friend,

W. C.

From the renewal of their intercourse, Lady Hesketh had manifested the most sincere and affectionate solicitude for her poor kinsman's welfare. Her offers of pecuniary assistance had been accepted as frankly as they were made, — this being one of those cases in which it is equally blessed to give and to receive. She had inquired minutely into the state of his health, and finding that he suffered much from indigestion, insisted upon his sending for a physician from Northampton. She sent him wine, and ordered him a supply of oysters through the season. Mrs. Unwin, so far from feeling that jealousy with which she has been reproached, was prepared to esteem her as more than a friend. "Tell Lady Hesketh that I truly love and honor her," was the message which she charged Cowper to deliver. "Now, my cousin," said he, "you may depend upon it as a most certain truth, that these words from her lips are not an empty sound : I never in my life heard her profess a regard for any one that she felt not. She is not addicted to the use of such language upon ordinary occasions ; but when she speaks it, speaks from the heart. She has baited me this many a day, even as a bear is baited, to send for Dr. Kerr. But, as I hinted to you upon a former occasion, I am as mulish as most men are, and have hitherto most gallantly refused. But what is to be done now ? If it were uncivil not to comply with the solicitations of one lady, to be unmoved by the solicitations of two, would prove me to be a bear indeed. I will therefore summon him to the consideration of said stomach and its ailments, without delay, and you shall know the result." ³⁷

³⁷ Nov. 30, 1785.

The physician's opinion was favorable; he saw no reason to doubt a speedy recovery; indeed his medicines seem to have produced their desired effect, and Cowper reported, in playful sport, his progress toward recovery. Of mental malady there was at that time no manifestation. Lady Hesketh feared to touch upon that string; but he, who understood her feelings, entered upon it himself. "You do not ask me, my dear," said he, "for an explanation of what I could mean by *anguish of mind*. — Because you *do not* ask, and because your reason for not asking consists of a delicacy and tenderness peculiar to yourself; for that very cause, I will tell you. A wish suppressed is more irresistible than many wishes plainly uttered. Know then, that in the year 1773, the same scene that was acted at St. Alban's opened upon me again at Olney, only covered with a still deeper shade of melancholy; and ordained to be of much longer duration. I was suddenly reduced from my wonted rate of understanding, to an almost childish imbecility. I did not, indeed, lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer, even to a difficult question; but a question was necessary, or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was accompanied, as I suppose it to be in most instances of the kind, with misapprehensions of things and persons, that made me a very untractable patient. I believed that every body hated me, and that Mrs. Unwin hated me most of all, — was convinced that all my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand megrims of the same stamp. I would not be more circumstantial than is necessary. Dr. Cotton was consulted. He replied, that he could do no more for me than might be done at Olney, but recommended particular vigilance, lest I should attempt my life, — a caution for which there was the greatest occasion. At the same time that I was convinced of Mrs. Unwin's aversion to me, I could endure no other companion. The whole management of me consequently devolved upon her, and a terrible task she had. She performed it, however, with a cheerfulness hardly ever equalled on such an occasion; and I have often heard her say, that if ever she praised God in her life, it was when she found that she was to have all the labor.

She performed it accordingly, but, as I hinted once before, very much to the hurt of her own constitution. It will be thirteen years, in little more than a week, since this malady seized me. Methinks I hear you ask, — your affection for me will, I know, make you wish to do so, — ‘Is it removed?’ I reply, In great measure, but not quite. Occasionally I am much distressed, but that distress becomes continually less frequent, and, I think, less violent. I find writing, and especially poetry, my best remedy. Perhaps, had I understood music, I had never written verse, but had lived upon fiddle-strings instead. It is better, however, as it is. A poet may, if he pleases, be of a little use in the world, while a musician, the most skilful, can only divert himself and a few others. I have been emerging gradually from this pit. As soon as I became capable of action, I commenced carpenter, made cupboards, boxes, and stools. I grew weary of this in about a twelvemonth, and addressed myself to the making of bird-cages. To this employment succeeded that of gardening, which I intermingled with that of drawing; but finding that the latter occupation injured my eyes, I renounced it, and commenced poet. I have given you, my dear, a little history in short-hand. I know it will touch your feelings, but do not let it interest them too much. *In the year when I wrote the Task*, (for it occupied me about a year,) *I was very often most supremely unhappy*; and am, under God, indebted in a good part to that work for not having been much worse.”³⁸

The different state of mind in which Cowper described his malady at Olney, from that in which he drew up the dreadful narrative of his madness in the Temple, and of his recovery at St. Alban’s, might induce, if not a belief of his perfect restoration, a reasonable hope of it. In the former instance, he fully believed that the happy change which had taken place in him was supernatural; and of this both Mr. Newton and Mrs. Unwin were so thoroughly persuaded, that many months elapsed after the second attack, violent as the access was, before they could bring themselves to ask Dr. Cotton’s advice. They thought that the disease was the work of the Enemy, and that nothing less than

³⁸ Jan. 16, 1786.

Omnipotence could free him from it. Means they allowed were in general not only lawful, but expedient ; but his was a peculiar and exempt case, in which they were convinced that the Lord Jehovah would be alone exalted when the day of deliverance should come.³⁹ Cowper had now learned to take a saner view of his own condition ; and Mrs. Unwin, who was no longer under any external excitement, and whose natural good sense had not yet been impaired, regarded it with the same sobriety, and while she prayed with unabating faith for his perfect restoration, employed all prudential means for averting a relapse. Experience, now that they were in a state to profit by it, had not been lost upon them ; and Mr. Unwin, from the time that his correspondence with Cowper commenced, had exercised a constant and beneficial influence, both over his mother and his friend.

As the General was expected to pay a visit at Olney, Lady Hesketh gave her cousin a hint upon the only subject which might possibly occasion any uncomfortable feeling between them. Cowper's reply shows what the change in his own views had been. "As to the affair of religious conversation," he said, "fear me not, lest I should trespass upon his peace in that way. Your views, my dear, upon the subject of a proper conduct in that particular, are mine also. When I left St. Alban's, I left it under impressions of the existence of a God, and of the truth of Scripture, that I had never felt before. I had unspeakable delight in the discovery, and was impatient to communicate a pleasure to others that I found so superior to every thing that bears the name. This eagerness of spirit, natural to persons newly informed, and the less to be wondered at in me, who had just emerged from the horrors of despair, made me imprudent, and, I doubt not, troublesome to many. Forgetting that I had not *those* blessings at my command which it is

³⁹ This is affirmed in a letter of Mrs. Unwin's, which was not in my possession till the former volume was published. It is one of the important letters for which the editor, the publishers, and the public, are obliged to Mr. Upcott. Had it reached me in time, its proper place would have been in the text: for the present, I insert it among the Supplementary Notes.

God's peculiar prerogative to impart, — spiritual light and affections, — I required in effect of all with whom I conversed, that they should see with my eyes; and stood amazed that the gospel, which with me was all in all, should meet with opposition, or should occasion disgust in any. But the gospel could not be the word of God if it did not; for it foretells its own reception among men, and describes it as exactly such. Good is intended, but harm is done, too often, by the zeal with which I was at that time animated. But, as in affairs of this life, so in religious concerns likewise, experience begets some wisdom in all who are not incapable of being taught. I do not now, neither have I, for a long time, made it my practice to force the subject of evangelical truth on any. I received it not from man myself, neither can any man receive it from me. God is light, and from him all light must come; to *his* teaching, therefore, I leave those whom I was once so alert to instruct myself. If a man asks my opinion, or calls for an account of my faith, he shall have it; otherwise I trouble him not. Pulpits for preaching; and the parlor, the garden, and the walk abroad, for friendly and agreeable conversation.”⁴⁰

The account which he had given of himself distressed his cousin. “I knew,” said he, “that my last letter would give you pain; but there is no need that it should give you so much. He who hath preserved me hitherto will still preserve me. All the dangers that I have escaped are so many pillars of remembrance, to which I shall hereafter look back with comfort, and be able, as I well hope, to inscribe on every one of them a grateful memorial of God's singular protection of me. Mine has been a life of wonders for many years, and a life of wonders I in my heart believe it will be to the end. Wonders I have seen in the great deeps, and wonders I shall see in the paths of mercy also. This, my dear, is my creed.”⁴¹ And this no doubt it was during many years, except at intervals, when the cloud came over him; which, however, at such times oppressed his spirits more than it darkened his understanding. His own letters, as they furnish the only materials,

⁴⁰ April 3, 1786.

⁴¹ January 28, 1786.

contain also the best account that could be given of his state of nerves. Telling Lady Hesketh that Dr. Kerr had recommended air and exercise as the best physic for him, and in all weathers, he says, "Come, therefore, my dear, and take a little of this good physic with me, for you will find it beneficial as well as I ; come and assist Mrs. Unwin in the reëstablishment of your cousin's health. Air and exercise, and she and you together, will make me a perfect Samson. You will have a good house over your head, comfortable apartments, obliging neighbors, good roads, a pleasant country, and in us, your constant companions, two who will love you, and do already love you, dearly and with all our hearts. If you are in any danger of trouble, it is from myself, if my fits of dejection seize me ; and as often as they do, you will be grieved for me ; but perhaps by your assistance I shall be able to resist them better. If there is a creature under heaven from whose coöperation with Mrs. Unwin I can reasonably expect such a blessing, that creature is yourself. I was not without such attacks when I lived in London, though at that time they were less oppressive ; but in your company I was never unhappy a whole day in all my life." ⁴²

The General's intended visit was prevented by his ill health ; the time fixed for Lady Hesketh's was June. "My dear," said her cousin, "I will not let you come till the end of May or the beginning of June, because, before that time, my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats ; and there you shall sit, with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine ; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention, the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present ; but he, poor fellow, is

⁴² May 8, 1786.

worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author ; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made ; but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament ; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlor, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long."

Among the circumstances which cheered Cowper at this time, there is one that proves how strong an interest he had excited in an individual. What was the nature of the first communication from this person cannot be collected from any documents that have yet appeared, but it is thus spoken of in a letter⁴³ to Lady Hesketh. "Hours and hours and hours have I spent in endeavors, altogether fruitless, to trace the writer of the letter that I send, by a minute examination of the character ; and never did it strike me, till this moment, that your father wrote it. In the style I discover him ; in the scoring of the emphatic words, (his never-failing practice ;) in the formation of many of the letters ; and in the Adieu ! at the bottom, so plainly, that I could hardly be more convinced had I seen him write it. Tell me, my dearest cousin, if you are not of my mind ? How much am I bound to love him if it be so ! Always much ; but in that case, if possible, more than ever.

"Farewell, thou beloved daughter of my beloved anonymous uncle."

That Lady Hesketh did not confirm this suspicion is certain, and he did not repeat it when he informed her of a second and more important letter from the same unknown.⁴⁴ "Anonymous is come again. May God bless him, who-soever he be, as I doubt not that he will ! A certain per-

⁴³ The date has been cut off with the signature, for some collector of autographs. But, from its place in the collection, the letter appears to have been written at the end of December, 1785.

⁴⁴ January 23, 1786.

son said on a certain occasion, (and He never spake word that failed,) ‘Whoso giveth you a cup of cold water in my name, shall by no means lose his reward.’ Therefore, anonymous as he chooses to be upon earth, his name, I trust, shall hereafter be found written in heaven. But when great princes, or characters much superior to great princes, choose to be incog., it is a sin against decency and good manners to seem to know them. I therefore know nothing of Anonymous, but that I love him heartily, and with most abundant cause. Had I opportunity, I would send you his letter, though, yourself excepted, I would indulge none with a sight of it. To confide it to *your* hands will be no violation of the secrecy that he has enjoined himself, and consequently me. But I can give you a short summary of its purport. — After an introduction of a religious cast, which does great honor to himself, and in which he makes an humble comparison between himself and me, by far too much to my advantage, he proceeds to tell me, that being lately in company where my last work was mentioned, mention was also made of my intended publication. He informs me of the different sentiments of the company on that subject, and expresses his own in terms the most encouraging; but adds, that having left the company and shut himself up in his chamber, an apprehension there seized him lest, if perhaps the world should not enter into my views of the matter, and the work should come short of the success that I hope for, the mortification might prove too much for my health; yet thinks that even in that case, I may comfort myself by adverting to similar instances of a failure, where the writer’s genius would have insured success, if any thing could have insured it, and alludes in particular to the fate and fortune of the *Paradise Lost*. In the last place, he gives his attention to my circumstances, takes the kindest notice of their narrowness, and makes me a present of an annuity of fifty pounds a year, wishing that it were five hundred pounds. In a P. S. he tells me that a small parcel will set off by the Wellinborough coach on Tuesday next, which he hopes will arrive safe. — I have given you the bones; but the benignity and affection, which

is the marrow of those bones, in so short an abridgment, I could not give you."

"I kept my letter unsealed to the last moment, that I might give you an account of the safe arrival of the expected parcel. It is at all points worthy of the letter-writer. Snuff-box, purse, notes, Bess, Puss, Tiney—all safe. Again, may God bless him!"

In his next letter⁴⁵ he says, "It is very pleasant, my dearest cousin, to receive a present so delicately conveyed as that which I received so lately from Anonymous; but it is also very painful to have nobody to thank for it. I find myself therefore driven, by stress of necessity, to the following resolution, viz. that I will constitute you my Thanks-receiver-general for whatsoever gift I shall receive hereafter, as well as for those that I have already received from a nameless benefactor. I therefore thank you, my cousin, for a most elegant present, including the most elegant compliment that ever poet was honored with; for a snuff-box of tortoise-shell, with a beautiful landscape on the lid of it, glazed with crystal, having the figures of three hares in the fore-ground, and inscribed above with these words, *The Peasant's Nest*—and below with these—*Tiney, Puss, and Bess*. For all and every of these, I thank you, and also for standing proxy on this occasion. Nor must I forget to thank you that so soon after I had sent you the first letter of Anonymous, I received another in the same hand.—There! now I am a little easier."

I have no means of ascertaining who this benefactor was; though undoubtedly Lady Hesketh was, as Cowper supposed, in the secret. It was not Lady Hesketh herself, because, after her offer of assistance had been made and

⁴⁵ This letter Hayley has printed. From his silence respecting the annuity, and also respecting the regular allowance which Cowper received from his relations, I am inclined to think that he never saw those letters to Lady Hesketh with which I have been intrusted. Speaking of his pecuniary circumstances when he settled at Olney, Hayley says, "He was very far from inheriting opulence on the death of his father." (vol. i. p. 93.) Mr. Grimshawe, leaving the rest of the paragraph as it stood, has substituted for these words the erroneous assertion, that "the death of his father placed him in a state of independence." (vol. i. p. 94.)

accepted, she would not have affected any mystery in bestowing it. Nor is it likely to have been her father. Hand-writings may, like faces, be distinctly remembered for twenty years, but in the course of twenty years both undergo a great though gradual change ; and it is more probable that Cowper should be mistaken when he thought he had detected his uncle's hand, than that the latter, choosing to remain unknown, should have given so direct a clew to a discovery. Could it be his daughter Theodora ? Were it not that the comparison which the letter-writer drew between Cowper and himself, seems to be one which would have occurred only to a man, I should have no doubt that Theodora was the person ; and notwithstanding that obvious objection, am still inclined to think so ; for the presents were what a woman would have chosen, and it is certain that her love was as constant as it was hopeless. Hers was a melancholy lot ; but she had the consolation of knowing now wherefore, and how wisely her father had acted in forbidding a marriage which must have made her miserable indeed.

However desirous Cowper may have been to know from whom this benefaction came, he thought himself bound to repress all curiosity. Upon the arrival of another letter, with the announcement of another parcel from the same unknown, he says to his cousin, " Who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does ? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be, so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him, that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness, and occasional slight inflammations, it is probable that they will always be ; but I cannot remember the time when they enjoyed any thing so like an exemption from those infirmities as at present. One would almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world. I

should be happy to remove his solicitude on the subject, but it is a pleasure that he will not let me enjoy. Well then, I will be content without it; and so content, that, though I believe you, my dear, to be in full possession of all this mystery, you shall never know me, while you live, either directly, or by hints of any sort, attempt to extort or to steal the secret from you. I should think myself as justly punishable as the Beth-shemites for looking into the ark, which they were not allowed to touch."

The more this is considered, the more probable it appears that the benefaction came from no other hand than Theodora's. The presents were all womanly, — all indicating a woman's kind and thoughtful regard for whatever might contribute to his comfort and convenience. The first had been a desk, which he supposed to be Lady Hesketh's gift; and the arrival of which, after it had been delayed on the road and impatiently expected, and almost despaired of at last, he announced (under that impression) in a postscript thus characteristically: ⁴⁶ "Oh that this letter had wings, that it might fly to tell you that my desk, the most elegant, the completest, the most commodious desk in the world, and of all the desks that are or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most, is safe arrived. Nay, my dear, it was actually at Sherrington when the wagoner's wife (for the man himself was not at home) croaked out her abominable 'No.' Yet she examined the bill of lading, but either did it so carelessly, or, as poor Dick Madan used to say, with such an *ignorant eye*, that my name escaped her. My precious cousin, you have bestowed too much upon me. I have nothing to render to you in return, but the affectionate feelings of a heart most truly sensible of your kindness. How pleasant it is to write upon such a green bank! I am sorry that I have so nearly reached the end of my paper. I have now, however, only room to say, that Mrs. Unwin is delighted with her box, and bids me do more than thank you for it. What can I do more, at this distance, but say that she loves you heartily, and that so do I? The pocket-book is also the completest that ever I saw, and the watch-

⁴⁶ Dec. 7, 1785.

chain the most brilliant. Adieu for a little while. Now for Homer. My dear, yours,

“W. C.”

In his next letter,⁴⁷ he says, “Dearest cousin, my desk is always pleasant, but never so pleasant as when I am writing to you. If I am not obliged to you for the thing itself, at least I am for your having decided the matter against me, and resolving that it should come in spite of all objections. If I must not know to whom I am primarily indebted for it, at least let me entreat you to make my acknowledgments of gratitude and love.”

Some womanly present usually accompanied the half-yearly remittance, and on one of these occasions further cause appeared for suspecting from what quarter they came. “By the post of yesterday,” he says to Lady Hesketh,⁴⁸ “I received a letter from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularized, in which letter allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, the Drop of Ink. The only copy I ever gave of that piece, I gave to yourself. It is *possible*, therefore, that between you and Anonymous there may be *some* communication. If that should be the case, I will beg you just to signify to him, as opportunity may occur, the safe arrival of his most acceptable present, and my most grateful sense of it.” Who but Theodora could it have been who was thus intimate with Lady Hesketh, and felt this deep, and lively, and constant regard for Cowper?

Cowper’s reflections upon the unexpected accession made by this annuity to his scanty means, express a cheerful trust in Providence, showing that then, at least, his mind was perfectly sane upon that point. “Wonder with me,” he says, “my beloved cousin, at the goodness of God, who, according to Dr. Watts’s beautiful stanza,

Can clear the darkest skies,
Can give us day for night,
Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
To rivers of delight.

⁴⁷ Dec. 15, 1785.

⁴⁸ Dec. 19, 1787.

As I said once before, so say I again, my heart is as light as a bird on the subject of Homer. Neither without prayer, nor without confidence in the providential goodness of God, has that work been undertaken or continued. I am not so dim-sighted, sad as my spirit is at times, but that I can plainly discern his Providence going before me in the way. Unforeseen, unhopèd-for advantages have sprung at his bidding, and a prospect at first cloudy indeed, and discouraging enough, has been continually brightening ever since I announced my intentions. But suppose the worst. Suppose that I should not succeed in any measure proportioned to my hopes. How then? Why then, my dear, I will hold this language with myself—‘To write was necessary to me. I undertook an honorable task, and with upright intentions. It served me more than two years for an amusement, and as such was of infinite service to my spirits. But God did not see it good for me that I should be very famous. If he did not, it is better for me that I am not. Fame is neither my meat nor my drink. I lived fifty years without it, and should I live fifty more, and get to heaven at last, then I shall be sure not to want it.’ So, my dear, you see that I am armed at all points. I do not mean that I should feel nothing, but that, thus thinking, I should feel supportably.”

No letters ever bore the stamp of sincerity more distinctly than Cowper’s. In thus expressing himself, he wrote as he thought, and would, in the event, have felt as he expected. Yet he had an ardent thirst for fame. “I am not ashamed,” he says, “to confess, that having commenced an author, I am most abundantly desirous to succeed as such. *I have (what perhaps you little suspect me of) in my nature an infinite share of ambition.* But with it, I have at the same time, as you well know, an equal share of diffidence. To this combination of opposite qualities it has been owing, that, till lately, I stole through life without undertaking any thing, yet always wishing to distinguish myself. At last I ventured, ventured too in the only path, that, at so late a period, was yet open to me; and am determined, if God have not determined otherwise, to work my way, through the obscurity that has been so long my portion, into notice.

Every thing, therefore, that seems to threaten this my favorite purpose with disappointment, affects me nearly. I suppose that all ambitious minds are in the same predicament. He who seeks distinction must be sensible of disapprobation, exactly in the same proportion as he desires applause. And now, my precious cousin, I have unfolded my heart to you in this particular, without a speck of dissimulation. Some people, and good people too, would blame me. But you will not; and they, I think, would blame without just cause. We certainly do not honor God, when we bury, or when we neglect to improve, as far as we may, whatever talent he may have bestowed on us, whether it be little or much. In natural things, as well as in spiritual, it is a never-failing truth, that to him who *hath*, (that is, to him that occupies what he hath diligently, and so as to increase it,) more shall be given. Set me down, therefore, my dear, for an industrious rhymer, so long as I shall have the ability. For in this only way is it possible for me, so far as I can see, either to honor God, or to serve man, or even to serve myself."

Cowper was happier at this time than he had ever been since the days of his youth. He was engaged in an undertaking not unworthy of his talents, and of the reputation he had acquired; it accorded equally with his inclination, his habits, and his health; and in the intervals of employment he had the expectation of seeing his cousin after the lapse of so many years, and the pleasure of making preparations for her reception. They would fain have had her for their guest, and have fitted up the room which served him for a study, as her chamber; but to this Lady Hesketh objected. It would not have been easy to find accommodation in Olney, if the greater part of the vicarage, which was "much too good for the living," had not been unoccupied and unfurnished. Mr. Scott, who was highly esteemed among persons of his own persuasion, had left this curacy to officiate at the Lock Hospital; and his successor in the cure being a bachelor, reserving two rooms for himself, was glad to let the rest of the house, which a shopkeeper engaged to furnish for the time of her abode. "The whole affair," said Cowper, "is thus commodiously adjusted; and now I have

nothing to do but to wish for June; and June, my cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say; and they will all rush into my mind together, but it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter; sooner or later they will all come out; and since we shall have you the longer for not having you under our roof, (a circumstance that more than any thing reconciles us to that measure,) they will stand the better chance. After so long a separation, a separation that of late seemed likely to last for life, we shall meet each other as alive from the dead; and for my own part, I can truly say, that I have not a friend in the other world, whose resurrection would give me greater pleasure."

A house at Weston, belonging to the Throckmortons, was at that time vacant, and these kind neighbors expressed an earnest wish that Mrs. Unwin and Cowper would take it for the sake of being near them. "If you, my cousin," said he, "were not so well provided for as you are, and at our very elbow, I verily believe I should have mustered all my rhetoric to recommend it to you. You might have it forever, without danger of ejectment, whereas your possession of the vicarage depends on the life of the vicar, who is eighty-six. The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where you would not soil your slippers, even in winter."⁴⁹ After looking at the house, he wrote to her, that it was such a one as in most respects would suit her well. "But Moses Brown, our vicar," said he, "who, as I told you, is in his eighty-sixth year, is not bound to die for that reason. He said himself, when he was here last summer, that he should live ten years longer; and for aught that appears, so he may; in which case, for the sake of its near neighborhood to us, the vicarage has charms for me that no other place can rival. But this and a thousand things more shall be talked over when you come."⁵⁰ —

⁴⁹ May 8, 1786.

⁵⁰ May 25.

"Come then, my beloved cousin, for I am determined, that 'whatsoever king shall reign, you shall be vicar of Olney.'"

He proposed to meet her at Newport Pagnel, but assented to her opinion that there would be many inconveniences in such an arrangement. "Assure yourself," said he, "my dearest cousin, that both for your sake, since you make a point of it, and for my own, I will be as philosophically careful as possible, that these fine nerves of mine shall not be beyond measure agitated, when you arrive. In truth, there is much greater probability that they will be benefited, and greatly too. Joy of heart, from whatever occasion it may arise, is the best of all nervous medicines; and I should not wonder if such a turn given to my spirits should have even a lasting effect of the most advantageous kind upon them. You must not imagine, neither, that I am, on the whole, in any great degree subject to nervous affections. Occasionally I am, and have been these many years, much liable to dejection; but at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. For I have not that which commonly is a symptom of such a case belonging to me—I mean extraordinary elevation in the absence of Mr. Bluedevil. When I am in the best health, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps forever, as any man need be. But, as I have often said, Mrs. Unwin shall be my expositor.

"Adieu, my beloved cousin. God grant that our friendship, which, while we could see each other, never suffered a moment's interruption, and which so long a separation has not in the least abated, may glow in us to our last hour, and be renewed in a better world, there to be perpetuated forever.

"For you must know, that I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be,

"Yours, forever,

"W. C."⁵¹

⁵¹ May 25.

When this passage was written, it is evident that his mind was free from the dreadful notion which characterized his insanity. And at this time, even in his darker moods, he spoke of his own state hopefully. "I have made your heart ache too often," said he, "my poor dear cousin, with talking about my fits of dejection. Something has happened that has led me to the subject, or I would have mentioned them more sparingly. Do not suppose, or suspect, that I treat you with reserve; there is nothing, in which I am concerned, that you shall not be made acquainted with; but the tale is too long for a letter. I will only add, for your present satisfaction, that the cause is not exterior, that it is not within the reach of human aid, and that yet I have a hope myself, and Mrs. Unwin a strong persuasion, of its removal. I am, indeed, even now, and have been for a considerable time, sensible of a change for the better, and expect, with good reason, a comfortable lift from you. Guess then, my beloved cousin, with what wishes I look forward to the time of your arrival, from whose coming I promise myself, not only pleasure, but peace of mind, at least an additional share of it. At present it is an uncertain and transient guest with me, but the joy with which I shall see and converse with you at Olney, may, perhaps, make it an abiding one."⁵²

Lady Hesketh arrived about the middle of June. "I am fond of the sound of bells," says Cowper, "but was never more pleased with those of Olney, than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage, (Lord Dartmouth excepted,) since we knew the town. In short, she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted at every thing that means to do her honor. Her first appearance was too much for me; my spirits, instead of being greatly raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me, under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat, or rather melancholy, throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself, and alarming to her. But I have made amends for this failure since, and in point of cheer-

fulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years."⁵³

To Hill he said that his dear cousin's arrival had made them happier than they ever were before at Olney, and that her company was a cordial of which he should feel the effect, not only while she remained there, but as long as he lived. He wrote cheerfully also to Mr. Newton. "It was an observation," said he, "of a sensible man whom I knew well in ancient days, (I mean when I was very young,) that people are never in reality happy when they boast much of being so. I feel myself accordingly well content to say, without any enlargement on the subject, that an inquirer after happiness might travel far, and not find a happier trio than meet every day either in our parlor, or in the parlor of the vicarage. I will not say that mine is not occasionally somewhat dashed with the sable hue of those notions concerning myself and my situation that have occupied or rather possessed me so long; but on the other hand, I can also affirm that my cousin's affectionate behavior to us both, the sweetness of her temper, and the sprightliness of her conversation, relieve me in no small degree from the presence of them."

There were discomforts attending his situation in Olney which Cowper felt, though he seldom allowed himself to complain of them. Upon telling Mr. Newton one winter, that owing to the state of the weather, he and Mrs. Unwin had not escaped into the fields more than three times since the autumn, he said, "Man, a changeable creature in himself, seems to subsist best in a state of variety, as his proper element: a melancholy man, at least, is apt to grow sadly weary of the same walks and the same pales, and to find that the same scene will suggest the same thoughts perpetually."⁵⁴ This is a melancholy passage; but a blacker melancholy possessed him when he described to the same friend his contentment in his situation, and the reason why he was contented. "I am not shut up in the Bastile," said he; "there are no moats about my castle, no locks upon my gates of which I have not the key; but an invisible,

⁵³ To Mr. Unwin, July 3.

⁵⁴ Feb. 2, 1782.

uncontrollable agency,—a local attachment,—an inclination more forcible than I ever felt even to the place of my birth, serves me for prison-walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass. In former years I have known sorrow, and before I had ever tasted of spiritual trouble. The effect was an abhorrence of the scene in which I had suffered so much, and a weariness of those objects which I had so long looked at with an eye of despondency and dejection. But it is otherwise with me now. The same cause subsisting, and in a much more powerful degree, fails to produce its natural effect. The very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal, and am persuaded, that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects, which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent ; some of them, perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighboring cottages, disgusting. But so it is ; and it is so, because here is to be my abode, and because such is the appointment of *Him* that placed me in it.

*Iste terrarum mihi præter omnes
Angulus ridet.*

It is the place of all the world I love the most, not for any happiness it affords me, but because here I can be miserable with most convenience to myself, and with the least disturbance to others."

During winter Cowper was fain, instead of healthier and more natural exercise, to use dumb-bells and a skipping-rope. His own health nevertheless suffered, want of wholesome exercise having been the cause of his stomach complaints ; and Mrs. Unwin, who had no such substitution, suffered more. Even in summer their situation was in this respect unfavorable. Writing to Lady Hesketh a little before her arrival, he says, "Our walks are, as I told you, beautiful, but it is a walk to get at them ; and though, when you come, I shall take you into training, as the jockeys say, and doubt not that I shall make a nimble and good walker of you in a

short time, you would find, as even I do in warm weather, that the preparatory steps are rather too many in number. Weston, which is our pleasantest retreat of all, is a mile off; and there is not in that whole mile to be found so much shade as would cover you. Mrs. Unwin and I have for many years walked thither every day in the year when the weather would permit; and to speak like a poet, the limes and the elms of Weston can witness for us both how often we have sighed and said, 'Oh that our garden-door opened into this grove, or into this wilderness! for we are fatigued before we reach them, and when we have reached them, have not time to enjoy them.' Thus stands the case, my dear, and the unavoidable *ergo*⁵⁵ stares you in the face:— would I could do so just at this moment! We have three or four other walks, but, except one, they all lie at such distance as you would find heinously incommodious; but Weston, as I said before, is our favorite. Of that we are never weary; its superior beauties gained it our preference at the first, and for many years it has prevailed to win us away from all the others. There was indeed, some time since, in a neighboring parish, called Lavendon, a field, one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little Paradise. But the poplars have been felled; and the scene has suffered so much by the loss, that though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charm sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses on this melancholy occasion."⁵⁶

This account prepared Lady Hesketh for the resolution which she formed immediately upon seeing that her cousin's habitation was as miserable in itself, as it was inconvenient in its situation. The expense of a removal was more than Cowper and Mrs. Unwin could at that time have incurred, even if they could have roused themselves to the effort. Lady Hesketh gave the impulse, and supplied the means; and before she had been a week at Olney, the house at Weston was taken. "And now," said Cowper to Mr. Un-

⁵⁵ That she should bring her own horses as well as carriage to Olney.

⁵⁶ May 1, 1786.

win, "I shall communicate intelligence that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and you sighed at the thought that your mother lived in it. Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purposes of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand: the bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to take us and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will, I hope, prove advantageous both to your mother and me, in all respects. Here we have no neighborhood; there we shall have most agreeable neighbors in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy-smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds, in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. A pretty deal of new furniture will be wanted, especially chairs and beds, all which my kind cousin will provide, and fit up a parlor and a chamber for herself into the bargain. So far is well; the rest is left to Heaven."⁵⁷

Lady Hesketh, speaking to her sister Theodora of the

⁵⁷ July 3, 1786.

intended removal to Weston, in one of the few fragments⁵⁸ of her letters which have been preserved, said, "He delights in the place, and likes the inhabitants much; and as they would greatly relieve the cruel solitude he lives in, I wish he could, with ease to himself, see as much of them as possible, for I am sure a little variety of company, and a little cheerful society, is necessary to him. Mrs. Unwin seems quite to think so, and expresses the greatest satisfaction that he has within the last year consented to mix a little more with human creatures. As to her, she does seem, in *real truth*, to have no will left on earth but for his good, and literally no will but *his*. How she has supported herself, (as she has done!) the constant attendance, day and night, which she has gone through for the last thirteen years, is to me, I confess, incredible. And in justice to her, I must say, she does it all with an ease that relieves you from any idea of its being a state of sufferance. She speaks of him in the highest terms; and by her astonishing management, he is never mentioned in Olney but with the highest respect and veneration."

"Our friend," says Lady Hesketh, in another fragment,⁵⁹ "delights in a large table and a large chair. There are two of the latter comforts in my parlor. I am sorry to say, that he and I always spread ourselves out on them, leaving poor Mrs. Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard to a soft one; and I hope she is sincere; indeed, I am persuaded she is. Her constant employment is knitting stockings, which she does with the finest needles I ever saw; and very nice they are,—the stockings I mean. Our cousin has not for many years worn any other than those of her manufacture. She knits silk, cotton, and worsted. She sits knitting on one side of the table in her spectacles, and he on the other reading to her (when he is not employed in writing) in *his*. In winter, his morning studies are always carried on in a room by himself; but as his evenings are spent

⁵⁸ Early Productions, &c. p. 62.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 65.

in the winter in transcribing, he usually, I find, does them *vis-a-vis* Mrs. Unwin. At this time of the year he writes always in the morning in what he calls his *boudoir*; this is in the garden: it has a door and a window; just holds a small table with a desk and two chairs; but though there are two chairs, and two persons *might* be contained therein, it would be with a degree of difficulty. For this cause, — as I make a point of not disturbing a poet in his retreat, — I go not there.”

It was said by Dr. Johnson, that “nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat, and drank, and lived in social intercourse with him.” Personal knowledge is, indeed, the greatest of all advantages for such an undertaking, notwithstanding the degree of restraint which must generally be regarded as one of its conditions. But when his letters are accessible, the writer may in great part be made his own biographer, — more fully, and perhaps more faithfully, than if he had composed his own memoirs, even with the most sincere intentions. For in letters, feelings, and views, and motives, are related as they existed at the time; whereas in retrospect much must of necessity be overlooked, and much be lost. Some of Cowper’s letters at this time are peculiarly interesting, both as illustrating his own character and Mr. Newton’s. He wrote to that sincere but injudicious friend upon his approaching change of residence.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Aug. 5, 1786.

You have heard of our intended removal. The house that is to receive us is in a state of preparation, and, when finished, will be both smarter and more commodious than our present abode. But the circumstance that recommends it chiefly is its situation. Long confinement in the winter, and indeed for the most part in the autumn too, has hurt us both. A gravel walk, thirty yards long, affords but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty: yet it is all that we have had to move in for eight months in the year, during thirteen years that I have been a prisoner. Had I been confined in the Tower, the battlements of it would

have furnished me with a larger space. You say well, that there was a time when I was happy at Olney ; and I am now as happy at Olney as I expect to be any where without the presence of God. Change of situation is with me no otherwise an object than as both Mrs. Unwin's health and mine may happen to be concerned in it. A fever of the slow and spirit-oppressing kind seems to belong to all, except the natives, who have dwelt in Olney many years ; and the natives have putrid fevers. Both they and we, I believe, are immediately indebted for our respective maladies to an atmosphere encumbered with raw vapors issuing from flooded meadows ; and we in particular, perhaps, have fared the worse, for sitting so often, and sometimes for months, over a cellar filled with water. These ills we shall escape in the uplands ; and as we may reasonably hope, of course, their consequences. But as for happiness, he that has once had communion with his Maker must be more frantic than ever I was yet, if he can dream of finding it at a distance from Him. I no more expect happiness at Weston than here, or than I should expect it, in company with felons and outlaws, in the hold of a ballast-lighter. Animal spirits, however, have their value, and are especially desirable to him who is condemned to carry a burden, which at any rate will tire him, but which, without their aid, cannot fail to crush him. The dealings of God with me are to myself utterly unintelligible. I have never met, either in books or in conversation, with an experience at all similar to my own. More than a twelvemonth has passed since I began to hope that, having walked the whole breadth of the bottom of this Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore ; and I prepared to sing the song of Moses. But I have been disappointed : those hopes have been blasted ; those comforts have been wrested from me. I could not be so duped even by the arch-enemy himself, as to be made to question the divine nature of them ; but I have been made to believe (which, you will say, is being duped still more) that God gave them to me in derision, and took them away in vengeance. Such, however, is, and has been, my persuasion many a long day ; and when I shall think on that subject more comfortably, or, as you

will be inclined to tell me, more rationally and scripturally, I know not. In the mean time, I embrace with alacrity every alleviation of my case, and with the more alacrity, because, whatsoever proves a relief of my distress, is a cordial to Mrs. Unwin, whose sympathy with me, through the whole of it, has been such, that, despair excepted, her burden has been as heavy as mine. Lady Hesketh, by her affectionate behavior, the cheerfulness of her conversation, and the constant sweetness of her temper, has cheered us both ; and Mrs. Unwin not less than me. By her help we get change of air and of scene, though still resident at Olney ; and by her means, have intercourse with some families in this country, with whom, but for her, we could never have been acquainted. Her presence here would, at any time, even in my happiest days, have been a comfort to me ; but, in the present day, I am doubly sensible of its value. She leaves nothing unsaid, nothing undone, that she thinks will be conducive to our well-being ; and, so far as she is concerned, I have nothing to wish, but that I could believe her sent hither in mercy to myself, — then I should be thankful.

I am, my dear friend, with Mrs. Unwin's love to Mrs. N. and yourself, hers and yours, as ever,

W. C.

Though this letter could not but draw tears from one who knew the writer so intimately, and loved him so well as Mr. Newton must have known and loved him, it might be supposed that the predominant feeling, which it would excite, would be pleasure at the favorable change that had taken place in his poor friend's external circumstances. The disappearance of Cowper's papers renders it impossible to say what, or whether any direct answer was made to it ; but about a month after its date, Mr. Newton wrote to Mrs. Unwin in a spirit, which, though the letter itself has been destroyed, or lost, may be perfectly understood by what Cowper says concerning it to her son.⁶⁰

"You have had your troubles, and we ours. This day three weeks, your mother received a letter from Mr. Newton,

⁶⁰ Sept. 24, 1786.

which she has not yet answered, nor is likely to answer hereafter. It gave us both much concern, but her more than me ; I suppose, because, my mind being necessarily occupied in my work, I had not so much leisure to browse upon the wormwood that it contained. The purport of it is, a direct accusation of me, and of her an accusation implied, that we have both deviated into forbidden paths, and lead a life unbecoming the gospel ; that many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished ; that he never so much doubted of my restoration to Christian privileges as now ; — in short, that I converse too much with people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so. He concludes with putting your mother in mind, that there is still an intercourse between London and Olney, by which he means to insinuate that we cannot offend against the decorum that we are bound to observe, but the news of it will most certainly be conveyed to him. — We do not at all doubt it. We never knew a lie hatched at Olney that waited long for a bearer ; and though we do not wonder to find ourselves made the subjects of false accusation in a place ever fruitful in such productions, we do, and must wonder a little, that he should listen to them with so much credulity. I say this, because, if he had heard only the truth, or had believed no more than the truth, he would not, I think, have found either me censurable, or your mother. And that *she* should be suspected of irregularities is the more wonderful, (for wonderful it would be at any rate,) because she sent him, not long before, a letter conceived in such strains of piety and spirituality, as ought to have convinced him that she, at least, was no wanderer. But what is the fact ? and how do we spend our time in reality ? What are the deeds for which we have been represented as thus criminal ? Our present course of life differs in nothing from that which we have both held these thirteen years, except that, after great civilities shown us, and many advances made on the part of the Throcks, we visit them ; that we visit also at Gayhurst ; that we have frequently taken airings with my cousin in her carriage ; and that I have sometimes taken a walk with her on a Sunday evening, and sometimes by myself ; which, however, your

mother has never done. These are the only novelties in our practice ; and if by these procedures, so inoffensive in themselves, we yet give offence, offence must needs be given. God and our own consciences acquit us, and we acknowledge no other judges.

“The two families with whom we have kicked up this astonishing intercourse are as harmless in their conversation and manners as can be found any where. And as to my poor cousin, the only crime that she is guilty of against the people of Olney is, that she has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered comfort to the sick ; except, indeed, that by her great kindness, she has given us a little lift in point of condition and circumstances, and has thereby excited envy in some who have not the knack of rejoicing in the prosperity of others. And this I take to be the root of the matter.

“My dear William, I do not know that I should have teased your nerves and spirits with this disagreeable theme, had not Mr. Newton talked of applying to you for particulars : he would have done it, he says, when he saw you last, but had not time. You are now qualified to inform him as minutely as we ourselves could, of all our enormities. Adieu ! Our sincerest love to yourself and yours.

“W^M. C.”

A spirit so intolerant and inquisitorial might have been deemed harsh and unbecoming even in a father confessor. But it will not appear surprising in Mr. Newton, when it is remembered that, in his own words,⁶¹ his “name was up about that country for preaching people mad ;” that, according to his own account, there were at one time “near a dozen of his flock,” and “most of them truly gracious people, disordered in their minds ;” and that he consoled himself with thinking, that “if the Lord brought them through fire and water safe to his kingdom, whatever they might suffer by the way, they were less to be pitied than the mad people of the world, who take occasion to scoff at the gospel, as if it was only fit to drive people out of their senses.” It was not, however, by fiery and sulphureous preaching that Mr.

⁶¹ Vol. i. p. 200.

Newton produced these deplorable effects; if he did not perceive the enormous evil of such preaching, he saw and acknowledged its unfitness. Moreover, he was a man in whom invincible strength of heart was combined with no ordinary degree of tenderness. The mischief which he caused, was effected by a system of excitement, by supererogatory services, by holding meetings which accord as little with the spirit as with the discipline of the Church of England, by making the yoke of his people painful and their burden heavy, by requiring them to commune with others upon those things on which our Savior has enjoined us to commune with our own hearts, and by never allowing them to be still.

His zeal and his genius, aided by the remarkable story of his life, had rendered him a conspicuous personage in what is called the religious world. Among those who were beginning to arrogate to themselves the designation of Evangelical clergy, there were none who approached him in abilities except Rowland Hill and the fierce Toplady. But spiritual pride treads close upon the heels of spiritual power; and that besetting sin manifested itself on this occasion towards Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. While he resided at Olney, he had acted as their spiritual director, — for that character is not confined to the Romish priesthood; — and when, upon his removal to London, they ceased to be under his superintendence, he appears to have considered it as a trespass if they moved out of the narrow circle within which he had circumscribed them; and “as absent in the body, but present in spirit,” to have supposed that he, like St. Paul, was authorized to “judge as though he were present.” How Cowper resented this unwarrantable interference has been seen in his letter to Mr. Unwin, towards whom he had no reserve: he must have been void of feeling if he had not felt as he there expressed himself. But when he wrote to Mr. Newton, the sense of former obligations and kindnesses, of true respect, and of as much affection as is compatible with any degree of fear, tempered his resentment. Mr. Newton, methinks, could not have read without emotion, nor without some self-reproach, the calm and melancholy strain of vindication in which he was addressed.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept. 30, 1786.

No length of separation will ever make us indifferent either to your pleasures or your pains. We rejoice that you have had so agreeable a jaunt, and (excepting Mrs. Newton's terrible fall, from which, however, we are happy to find that she received so little injury) a safe return. We, who live always encompassed by rural scenery, can afford to be stationary; though we ourselves, were I not too closely engaged with Homer, should perhaps follow your example, and seek a little refreshment from variety and change of place—a course that we might find not only agreeable, but, after a sameness of thirteen years, perhaps useful. You must, undoubtedly, have found your excursion beneficial, who at all other times endure, if not so close a confinement as we, yet a more unhealthy one, in city air and in the centre of continual engagements.

Your letter to Mrs. Unwin, concerning our conduct and the offence taken at it in our neighborhood, gave us both a great deal of concern; and she is still deeply affected by it. Of this you may assure yourself, that if our friends in London have been grieved, they have been misinformed; which is the more probable, because the bearers of intelligence hence to London are not always very scrupulous concerning the truth of their reports; and that if any of our serious neighbors have been astonished, they have been so without the smallest real occasion. Poor people are never well employed even when they judge one another; but when they undertake to scan the motives and estimate the behavior of those whom Providence has exalted a little above them, they are utterly out of their province and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which in fact it never does. We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's, and at Gayhurst; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance; more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business in the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way.

The rest of our journeys are to Beaujeat turnpike and back again ; or, perhaps, to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says,

The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more.

What good we can get or can do in these visits, is another question, — which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connections ; that we should have hurt the Christian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish abstinence from them ; and that St. Paul himself, conducted to them as we have been, would have found it expedient to have done as we have done. It is always impossible to conjecture, to much purpose, from the beginnings of a providence, in what it will terminate. If we have neither received nor communicated any spiritual good at present, while conversant with our new acquaintance, at least no harm has befallen on either side ; and it were too hazardous an assertion even for our censorious neighbors to make, that, because the cause of the gospel does not appear to have been served at present, therefore it never can be in any future intercourse that we may have with them. In the mean time I speak a strict truth, and as in the sight of God, when I say that we are neither of us at all more addicted to gadding than heretofore. We both naturally love seclusion from company, and never go into it without putting a force upon our disposition ; at the same time I will confess, and you will easily conceive, that the melancholy incident to such close confinement as we have so long endured, finds itself a little relieved by such amusements as a society so innocent affords. You may look round the Christian world, and find few, I believe, of our station, who have so little intercourse as we with the world that is not Christian.

We place all the uneasiness that you have felt for us upon this subject, to the account of that cordial friendship of which you have long given us proof. But you may be assured, that, notwithstanding all rumors to the contrary, we are exactly what we were when you saw us last ; — I, miserable on ac-

count of God's departure from me, which I believe to be final; and she, seeking his return to me in the path of duty, and by continual prayer.⁶²

Yours, my dear friend,
W. C.

Cowper retained no resentments; nor indeed could any uncomfortable feeling be of long continuance between two persons who entertained so sincere a regard for each other. Their correspondence, therefore, resumed its wonted tone, being interrupted only on Cowper's part by the hurry and confusion consequent upon a removal. Lady Hesketh remained at Olney till the middle of November, and on the day after her departure, her cousin and Mrs. Unwin took possession of their new abode.

⁶² I think it fitting here to extract Mr. Grimshawe's remarks upon this transaction.

"That the above letter may be fully understood, it is necessary to state, that Mr. Newton had received an intimation from Olney that the habits of Cowper, since the arrival of Lady Hesketh, had experienced a change; and that an admonitory letter from himself might not be without its use. Under these circumstances, Newton addressed such a letter to his friend as the occasion seemed to require. The answer of Cowper is already before the reader, and in our opinion amounts to a full justification of the poet's conduct. We know from various testimonies of unquestionable authority, that no charge tending to impeach the consistency of Mrs. Unwin, or of Cowper, can justly be alleged. If Newton should be considered as giving too easy a credence to these reports, or too rigid and ascetic in his spirit, we conceive that he could not, consistently with his own views as a faithful minister, and his deep interest in the welfare of Cowper, have acted otherwise, though he may possibly have expressed himself too strongly." — Vol. iii. pp. 220—1.

CHAPTER XIV.

COWPER AT WESTON. MR. UNWIN'S DEATH. RETURN OF COWPER'S MALADY. OLD FRIENDSHIPS RENEWED, AND NEW ONES FORMED.

"THERE are some things," said Cowper to Mr. Bagot,¹ who was now one of his regular correspondents, "that do not actually shorten the life of man, yet seem to do so; and frequent removals from place to place are of that number. For my own part, at least, I am apt to think, if I had been more stationary, I should seem to myself to have lived longer. My many changes of habitation have divided my time into many short periods, and when I look back upon them, they appear only as the stages in a day's journey, the first of which is at no very great distance from the last.

"I lived longer at Olney than any where. There, indeed, I lived, till mouldering walls and a tottering house warned me to depart. I have accordingly taken the hint, and two days since arrived, or rather took up my abode at Weston. You, perhaps, have never made the experiment, but I can assure you, that the confusion which attends a transmigration of this kind is infinite, and has a terrible effect in deranging the intellects. I have been obliged to renounce my Homer on the occasion, and though not for many days, I feel as if study and meditation, so long my confirmed habits, were on a sudden become impracticable, and that I shall certainly find them so when I attempt them again. But in a scene so much quieter and pleasanter than that which I have just escaped from, in a house so much more commodious, and with furniture about me so much more to my taste, I shall hope to recover my literary tendency again, when once the bustle of the occasion shall have subsided.

"How glad I should be to receive you under a roof where you would find me so much more comfortably accommodated than at Olney! I know your warmth of heart toward me, and am sure that you would rejoice in my joy. At present, indeed, I have not had time for much self-

¹ Nov. 17, 1786.

gratulation, but have every reason to hope, nevertheless, that in due time I shall derive considerable advantage, both in health and spirits, from the alteration made in my *whereabout*."

On the same day he announced his removal to Mr. Newton. "When God speaks to a chaos," said he, "it becomes a scene of order and harmony in a moment; but when his creatures have thrown one house into confusion by leaving it, and another by tumbling themselves and their goods into it, not less than many days' labor and contrivance is necessary to give them their proper places. And it belongs to furniture of all kinds, however convenient it may be in its place, to be a nuisance out of it. We find ourselves here in a comfortable dwelling. Such it is in itself; and my cousin, who has spared no expense in dressing it up for us, has made it a genteel one. Such, at least, it will be when its contents are a little harmonized. She left us on Tuesday, and on Wednesday in the evening Mrs. Unwin and I took possession. I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts; and though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heartache when I took my last leave of a scene that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu to a place in which God had so often found me. The human mind is a great mystery; mine, at least, appeared to me to be such upon this occasion. I found that I not only had a tenderness for that ruinous abode, because it had once known me happy in the presence of God, but that even the distress I had suffered for so long a time, on account of his absence, had endeared it to me as much. I was weary of every object, had long wished for a change, yet could not take leave without a pang at parting. What consequences are to attend our removal, God only knows. I know well that it is not in situation to effect a cure of melancholy like mine. The change, however, has been entirely a providential one; for much as I wished it, I never uttered that wish, except to Mrs. Unwin. When I learned that the house was to be let, and had seen it, I had a strong

desire that Lady Hesketh should take it for herself, if she should happen to like the country. That desire, indeed, is not exactly fulfilled; and yet, upon the whole, is exceeded. We are the tenants; but she assures us that we shall often have her for a guest; and here is room enough for us all. You, I hope, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton, will want no assurances to convince you that you will always be received here with the sincerest welcome. More welcome than you have been, you cannot be; but better accommodated you may and will be."

They had been little more than a fortnight in their new habitation, before they received an account of Mr. Unwin's being dangerously ill, and this was speedily followed by tidings of his death. Mr. Henry Thornton, with whom he was travelling, had been seized with a typhus fever at Winchester, and recovered from it; Unwin took the infection, and to him it proved fatal. He was a man of sincere but sober piety, and of considerable talents, which he had carefully improved. His disposition was cheerful, his affections warm and constant, and his manners singularly amiable; — one of those rare persons who are liked at first sight, and loved in proportion as they are known. Cowper was not the only distinguished author who consulted him upon his writings; his old tutor, Paley, had the same high opinion of his judgment, and manifested it by the same proof. At Lady Hesketh's recommendation, the guardians of her late husband's heir, being very desirous of finding a tutor who would train him up conscientiously and wisely in the way he should go, had just concluded an arrangement for placing him with Mr. Unwin.

"It is well for his mother," said Cowper, "that she has spent her life in the practice of an habitual acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence; else I know that this stroke would have been heavier, after all that she has suffered upon another account, than she could have borne."² "She suffers this stroke, not with more patience and submission than I expected, for I never knew her hurried by any affliction into the loss of either, but in appearance, at

² To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 4.

least, and at present with less injury to her health than I apprehended.”³

Cowper himself appeared to suffer less than those who knew his love for the deceased might have expected. Alexander Knox has observed, “that the difference between the letters written to Mr. Newton and to Unwin is particularly striking;” that “there is regard and estimation in the one; friendship, genuine and vivid, in the other.”⁴ Like the mother, Cowper controlled his feelings; but the sorrow which she sustained with the composure of a mind habitually subdued, he made an effort to throw off. “She,” said he, “derives, as she well may, great consolation from the thought, that he lived the life and died the death of a Christian. The consequence is, if possible, more unavoidable than the most mathematical conclusion, that therefore he is happy. So farewell, my friend Unwin! the first man for whom I conceived a friendship after my removal from St. Alban’s, and for whom I cannot but still continue to feel a friendship, though I shall see thee with these eyes no more!” To Mr. Newton he said that it was a subject on which he could say much, and with much feeling, but that, habituated as his mind had been these many years to melancholy themes, he was glad to excuse himself the contemplation of them as much as possible; and he could not think of the widow and children whom Mr. Unwin had left without a heartache such as he never remembered to have felt before.⁵

He applied himself to the revision of his *Homer*, and in his letters to his cousin resumed that playful manner which rendered them so delightful. But it soon appeared that he had reckoned upon more strength than he possessed. “I have not touched *Homer* to-day,” he says, (the fifth after he had announced his friend’s decease to Lady Hesketh.) “Yesterday was one of my terrible seasons, and when I arose this morning, I found that I had not sufficiently recov-

³ To Mr. Smith, Dec. 9.

⁴ Correspondence with Bishop Jebb, vol. i. p. 274. “I suppose,” he adds, “there are not in the world letters equal in merit, as compositions, to those of Cowper to Unwin.”

⁵ Dec. 16.

ered myself to engage in such an occupation. Having letters to write, I the more willingly gave myself a dispensation. — Good night!"⁶ Two days after, he says, "The cloud that I mentioned to you, my cousin, has passed away, — or perhaps the skirts of it may still hang over me. I feel myself, however, tolerably brisk, and tell you so because I know you will be glad to hear it. The grinners at John Gilpin little dream what the author sometimes suffers. How I hated myself yesterday for having ever wrote it! May God bless thee, my dear! Adieu."⁷

But the cloud which he hoped had passed away was again gathering. "Once since we left Olney," says he to Mr. Newton, "I had occasion to call at our old dwelling; and never did I see so forlorn and woful a spectacle. Deserted of its inhabitants, it seemed as if it could never be dwelt in forever. The coldness of it, the dreariness, and the dirt, made me think it no unapt resemblance of a soul that God has forsaken. While he dwelt in it, and manifested himself there, he could create his own accommodations, and give it occasionally the appearance of a palace; but the moment he withdraws, and takes with him all the furniture and embellishment of his graces, it becomes what it was before he entered it — the habitation of vermin, and the image of desolation. Sometimes I envy the living, but not much, or not long; for while they live, as we call it, they too are liable to desertion. But the dead who have died in the Lord, I envy always; for they, I take it for granted, can be no more forsaken."

He was not, however, yet wholly possessed by such feelings, and seems to have pursued as wise a course of self-management as the most judicious friend could have advised. Early in January, (the month which he dreaded,) he says to Lady Hesketh,⁸ "I have had a little nervous feeling lately, my dear, that has somewhat abridged my sleep; and though I find myself better to-day than I have been since it seized me, yet I feel my head lightish, and not in the best order for writing. You will find me, therefore, not only less alert in my manner than I usually am

⁶ Dec. 9.⁷ Dec. 11.⁸ Jan. 8, 1787.

when my spirits are good, but rather shorter: I will, however, proceed to scribble till I find that it fatigues me; and then will do, as I know you would bid me do were you here, — shut up my desk and take a walk.”

At this time Mr. Newton expressed his regret, that instead of the version on which he was now engaged, he had not undertaken a work of his own. He replied,⁹ “I have many kind friends, who, like yourself, wish that, instead of turning my endeavors to a translation of Homer, I had proceeded in the way of original poetry. But I can truly say that it was ordered otherwise, not by me, but by the Providence that governs all my thoughts, and directs my intentions as he pleases. It may seem strange, but it is true, that after having written a volume, in general with great ease to myself, I found it impossible to write another page. The mind of man is not a fountain, but a cistern; and mine, God knows, a broken one. It is my creed, that the intellect depends as much, both for the energy and the multitude of its exertions, upon the operations of *God's* agency upon it, as the heart, for the exercise of its graces, upon the influence of the Holy Spirit. According to this persuasion, I may very reasonably affirm, that it was not God's pleasure that I should proceed in the same track, because he did not enable me to do it. A whole year I waited, and waited in circumstances of mind that made a state of non-employment peculiarly irksome to me. I longed for the pen, as the only remedy, but I could find no subject: extreme distress of spirit at last drove me, as, if I mistake not, I told you some time since, to lay Homer before me, and translate for amusement. Why it pleased God that I should be hunted into such a business, of such enormous length and labor, by miseries for which He did not see good to afford me any other remedy, I know not. But so it was; and jejune as the consolation may be, and unsuited to the exigencies of a mind that once was spiritual, yet a thousand times have I been glad of it; for a thousand times it has served at least to divert my attention, in some degree, from such terrible tempests as I believe have seldom been permitted to beat upon a human mind. Let my friends, there-

⁹ Jan. 13, 1787.

fore, who wish me some little measure of tranquillity in the performance of the most turbulent voyage that ever Christian mariner made, be contented, that, having Homer's mountains and forests to windward, I escape, under their shelter, from the force of many a gust that would almost upset me; especially when they consider that, not by choice, but by necessity, I make *them* my refuge. As to fame, and honor, and glory, that may be acquired by poetical feats of any sort, God knows, that if I could lay me down in my grave with hope at my side, or sit with hope at my side in a dungeon all the residue of my days, I would cheerfully waive them all. For the little fame that I have already earned has never saved me from one distressing night, or from one despairing day, since I first acquired it. *For* what I am reserved, or *to* what, is a mystery; — I would fain hope, not merely that I may amuse others, or only to be a translator of Homer."

In the same letter, speaking of one of Mr. Newton's former parishioners, he alludes to his own state, and expresses an opinion concerning it, according with that in which his friend and Mrs. Unwin had acted upon the former recurrence of his malady. — "Sally Perry's case," said he, "has given me much concern. I have no doubt that it is distemper. But distresses of mind that are occasioned by distemper, are the most difficult of all to deal with. They refuse all consolation; they will hear no reason. God only, by his own immediate impression, can remove them; as after an experience of thirteen years' misery, I can abundantly testify."

The nervous fever of which he had complained, still affected him when this letter was written; during a whole week, his nights were almost sleepless, and after one effort more, he was forced to lay his translation aside. "This," says he, "was a sensible mortification to me, as you may suppose, and felt the more because, my spirits of course failing with my strength, I seemed to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard therefore to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer's battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the day-

time. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God, that it return not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed. I walk constantly, that is to say, Mrs. Unwin and I together; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me all her time and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world.”¹⁰

Before, however, this letter was concluded, he found it proper to state that the fever, though it sometimes seemed to leave him, was not yet gone, that it was altogether of the nervous kind, and attended now and then with much dejection. “A young gentleman,” he proceeds to say, “called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey from London to Glasgow, having just left the university there. He came, I suppose, partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of the Scotch professors, for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present; therefore I send it.”

These were the last lines which Cowper wrote before his malady returned upon him with full force. There is no other account of it than the little which is said in his own letters after his recovery. “My indisposition could not be of a worse kind. The sight of any face, except Mrs. Unwin’s, was to me an insupportable grievance; and when it has happened that by forcing himself into my hiding-place, some friend has found me out, he has had no great cause to exult in his success. — From this dreadful condition of mind, I emerged suddenly; so suddenly, that Mrs. Unwin, having no notice of such a change herself, could give none to any body; and when it obtained, how long it might last, or how far it might be depended on, was a matter of the greatest uncertainty.”¹¹ The disease appears to have continued about six months before it left him, as thus stated. Mrs. Newton would have come to Mrs. Unwin’s assistance

¹⁰ To Lady Hesketh, 1787.

¹¹ To Mr. Newton, Oct. 20, 1787.

during her long and painful attendance upon the maniac ; but his impatience of any other person's presence rendered this impossible, and for the same reason, Mr. Newton deferred an intended visit to Olney. " You judged rightly," says Cowper, " when you supposed that even your company would have been no relief to me ; the company of my father or my brother, could they have returned from the dead to visit me, would have been none to me."

The last visitor whom he had seen before his seizure, happened to be the first also after his recovery. Samuel Rose — one of those persons whose memory will always be preserved with Cowper's — was the son of Dr. William Rose, who kept a school at Chiswick, published an edition of *Salust*, and was largely concerned in the *Monthly Review*.¹² He found Cowper, on his second visit, in a state to derive pleasure from society ; and the first letter which Cowper wrote,¹³ was to thank him for this visit, and for sending him Burns's poems. Nothing, he said, but the constraint of obligation could have induced him to write ; but though, in his present state of mind, he could taste nothing, he read, nevertheless, partly from habit, and partly because it was the only thing of which he was capable ; and therefore he had read these poems, and had read them twice. He expressed his admiration of them, but remarked, that it would be a pity if the author should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appeared perfectly qualified to excel ; and he subscribed himself, " your obliged and affectionate humble servant."

Rose was only twenty years of age, and there must have been something remarkable in the conversation and manners of so young a man to have produced so favorable an impression on so slight an acquaintance. Such impressions are not often fallacious, especially in persons of mature years ; and in this instance they were fully confirmed and justified.

¹² Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. iii. p. 387. — " A gentleman," Mr. Nichols says, " well known in the republic of letters, and highly esteemed for his public spirit, his friendly disposition, his amiable and cheerful temper, and his universal benevolence."

¹³ July 24, 1787.

After six weeks, Cowper, who had not taken up the pen again during that interval, wrote to him a second time. "The little taste," said he, "that I have had of your company, and your kindness in finding me out, make me wish that we were nearer neighbors, and that there were not so great a disparity in our years; — that is to say, not that you were older, but that I were younger. Could we have met in early life, I flatter myself that we might have been more intimate than now we are likely to be. But you shall not find me slow to cultivate such a measure of your regard as your friends of your own age can spare me. When your route shall lie through this country, I shall hope that the same kindness which has prompted you twice to call on me will prompt you again, and I shall be happy if, on a future occasion, I may be able to give you a more cheerful reception than can be expected from an invalid. My health and spirits are considerably improved, and I once more associate with my neighbors. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so; is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavorable to poetical employment; but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects, as to encourage in me a hope that by perseverance in the use of it I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer.

"When I cannot walk, I read, and read perhaps more than is good for me. But I cannot be idle."¹⁴

And now he resumed the correspondence with Lady Hesketh, which for seven months had been left to Mrs. Unwin. "Though it costs me something to write," said he, "it would cost me more to be silent. My intercourse with my neighbors being renewed, I can no longer seem to forget how many reasons there are, why you especially should not be neglected, — no neighbor, indeed, but the kindest of my friends, and ere long, I hope an inmate.

"My health and spirits seem to be mending daily; to what end I know not, neither will conjecture, but endeavor, as far as I can, to be content that they do so. I use exercise, and take the air in the park and wilderness. I read much,

¹⁴ Aug. 27, 1787.

but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own. Mr. Throckmorton, having long since put me in possession of all his grounds, has now given me possession of his library — an acquisition of great value to me, who never have been able to live without books since I first knew my letters, and who have no books of my own. — They often inquire after you, and ask me whether you visit Weston this summer. I answer, yes, and I charge you, my dearest cousin, to authenticate my information. Write to me, and tell us when we may expect to see you. — I write but little, because writing is become new to me; but I shall come on by degrees.”¹⁵

Lady Hesketh’s answer was not delayed, but it gave a melancholy reason wherefore her visit must be postponed. “Come,” he replied, “when thou canst come, secure of being always welcome! All that is here is thine, together with the hearts of those who dwell here. I am only sorry that your journey hither is necessarily postponed beyond the time when I did hope to have seen you; sorry too that my uncle’s infirmities are the occasion of it. But years *will* have their course, and their effect; they are happiest, so far as this life is concerned, who like him escape those effects the longest, and who do not grow old before their time. Trouble and anguish do that for some, which only longevity does for others. A few months since I was older than your father is now, and though I have lately recovered, as Falstaff says, *some smatch of my youth*, I have but little confidence, in truth none, in so flattering a change, but expect, *when I least expect it*, to wither again. The past is a pledge for the future.”¹⁶

The next was in a more cheerful strain, but it gave some account of the frightful sensations which he had experienced, and of the treatment which had been pursued. “I continue,” he said, “to write, though in compassion of my pate, you advised me for the present to abstain. In reality I

¹⁵ Aug. 30.¹⁶ Sept. 4.

have no need, at least I believe not, of any such caution. Those jarrings that made my skull feel like a broken egg-shell, and those twirls that I spoke of, have been removed by an infusion of the bark, which I have of late constantly applied to. I was blooded, indeed, but to no purpose; for the whole complaint was owing to relaxation. But the apothecary recommended phlebotomy, in order to ascertain that matter; wisely suggesting that if I found no relief from bleeding, it would be a sufficient proof that weakness must necessarily be the cause. It is well when the head is chargeable with no weakness but what may be cured by an astringent.”¹⁷ — His letters now became playful again, and preserved that tone even when he spoke of his own diseased sensations. “I have a perpetual din,” he says, “in my head, and, though I am not deaf, hear nothing aright, neither my own voice, nor that of others. I am under a tub, from which tub accept my best love. Yours,

“W. C.”

He had not yet, since his recovery, written to Mr. Newton, though more than two months had elapsed since he became capable of writing to his friends. The letter with which he renewed the correspondence commenced by confessing an extraordinary delusion of mind; concerning which, however it may be doubted whether it had really obtained from the time of his former recovery, or had arisen during the last occurrence of his disease, and was like one of those dreams which perplex us with the semblance of some imperfectly-remembered reality. “My dear friend,” he begins, “after a long but necessary interruption of our correspondence, I return to it again, in one respect, at least, better qualified for it than before; I mean by a belief of your identity, which for thirteen years I did not believe. The acquisition of this light, if light it may be called, which leaves me as much in the dark as ever on the most interesting subjects, releases me, however, from the disagreeable suspicion that I am addressing myself to you as the friend whom I loved and valued so highly in my better days,

¹⁷ Sept. 8.

¹⁸ Sept. 29.

while in fact you are not that friend, but a stranger. I can now write to you without seeming to act a part, and without having any need to charge myself with dissimulation — a charge from which, in that state of mind and under such an uncomfortable persuasion, I knew not how to exculpate myself, and which, as you will easily conceive, not seldom made my correspondence with you a burden. Still, indeed, it wants, and is likely to want, that best ingredient which can alone make it truly pleasant either to myself or you — that spirituality which once enlivened all our intercourse. You will tell me, no doubt, that the knowledge I have gained is an earnest of more and more valuable information, and that the dispersion of the clouds in part, promises, in due time, their complete dispersion. I should be happy to believe it; but the power to do so is at present far from me. Never was the mind of man benighted to the degree that mine has been. The storms that have assailed me would have over-set the faith of every man that ever had any; and the very remembrance of them, even after they have been long passed by, makes hope impossible.”

Thanking him then for Mrs. Newton's proffered assistance on his own part and Mrs. Unwin's, “whose poor bark,” said he, “is still held together, though shattered by being tossed and agitated so long at the side of mine,” he excused himself for not writing more at length, on the ground that it did not suit him to write much at a time; saying, “This last tempest has left my nerves in a worse condition than it found them; my head especially, though better informed, is more infirm than ever.”¹⁹

He had now the hope of soon seeing Lady Hesketh, to whom he says, “You have made us both happy by giving us a nearer prospect of your arrival. But Mrs. Unwin says, you must not fix an early day for your departure, nor talk of staying only two or three weeks, because it will be a thorn that she shall lean upon all the time you are here; and so say I. It is a comfort to be informed when a visitor will go, whom we wish to be rid of, but the reverse of a comfort, my cousin, when you are in question.”²⁰ As the

¹⁹ Oct. 2.

²⁰ Sept. 8.

visit must have been for so short a time, its farther deferment caused the less disappointment ; and Cowper could not but acquiesce in the reasons which detained Lady Hesketh in town. "I read with much pleasure, my dear cousin," said he, "the account that you give of my uncle, his snug and calm way of living, the neatness of his little person, and the cheerfulness of his spirit. How happy is he at so advanced an age to have those with him, whose chief delight is to entertain him, and to be susceptible as he is of being amused ! Longevity, that, in general, either deprives a man of his friends, or of the power of enjoying their conversation, deals with *him* more gently, and still indulges him in the possession of those privileges which alone make life desirable. May he long continue to possess them ! I acquiesce entirely in the justness of your reasoning on this subject, and must needs confess that were I your father, I should with great reluctance resign you to the demands of any cousin in the world. I shall be happy to see you, my dear, yet once again, but not till I can enjoy that happiness without the violation of any proprieties on your part, not till he can spare you. Give my love to him, and tell him that I am not so much younger than he is *now*, as I was when I saw him last. As years proceed, the difference between the elder and the younger is gradually reduced to nothing. But you will come, and in the mean time the rich and the poor rejoice in the expectation of you ; to whom may be added a third sort, ourselves for instance, who are of neither of these descriptions."

²¹

The middle of November was fixed for her coming. "Now, that there is something like a time appointed," he says, "I feel myself a little more at my ease. Days and weeks slide imperceptibly away ; November is at hand, and the half of it, as you observe, will soon be over. Then, no impediment intervening, we shall meet once more — a happiness of which I so lately despaired. My uncle, who so kindly spared you before, will, I doubt not, spare you again. He knows that a little frisk in country air will be serviceable to you ; and even to my welfare, which is not a little concerned in the matter, I am persuaded he is not

²¹ Sept. 20, 1787.

indifferent. For this, and for many other reasons, I ardently wish that he may enjoy, and long enjoy, the measure of health with which he is favored.”²²

The promise was then for a month, which he said would be short indeed unless she could contrive to lengthen it. But the middle of November came, and with it another postponement. He replied, “My dearest cousin, we are therefore not to meet before Christmas; there is a combination of King, Lords, and Commons, against it, and we must submit. I do it with an ill grace, but in a corner, and nobody, not even yourself, shall know with how much reluctance. In consideration of the necessity there is that should you come on this side Christmas, you must return immediately after the holidays, on account of those three limbs of the legislature coming together again, I am so far well content that your journey hither should be postponed till your continuance here shall be less liable to interruption; and I console myself, in the mean time, with frequent recollections of that passage in your letter, in which you speak of frequent visits to Weston. This is a comfort on which I have only one drawback; and it is the reflection that I make without being able to help it, on the state and nature of my constant experience, which has taught me that what I hope for with most pleasure, is the very thing in which I am most likely to meet with a disappointment. But sufficient to the past is the evil thereof; let futurity speak for itself!”²³

Meantime he began to feel the pleasures, and some of the inconveniences, of being an eminent author. Odes were composed to his honor and glory, the report of which reached him, though he was not always “gratified with their sight.” “But I have at least,” says he,²⁴ “been tickled with some douceurs of a very flattering nature by the post. A lady unknown addresses the ‘best of men;’ an unknown gentleman has read my ‘inimitable poems,’ and invites me to his seat in Hampshire; another incognito gives me hopes of a memorial in his garden; and a

²² Oct. 27.

²³ Nov. 17.

²⁴ To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 3, 1787.

Welsh attorney sends me his verses to revise, and obligingly asks,

Say, shall my little bark attendant sail,
Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale?

If you find me a little vain, hereafter, my friend, you must excuse it, in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if not something greater." With or without cause, and with or without consideration, strangers bestowed upon him some of that leisure of which they presumed he had as much to dispose of as themselves, till (in his own words) he began "to perceive, that if a man will be an author, he must live neither to himself nor to his friends, so much as to others, whom he never saw nor shall see."

But the most amusing proof both of his celebrity and his good nature, is thus related to Lady Hesketh:—"On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows:—"Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All Saints in Northampton; brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You will do me a great favor, sir, if you would furnish me with one." To this I replied, 'Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town; why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox the statuary, who, every body knows, is a first rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose.'—"Alas! sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him." I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, Perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my muse, and on his replying in the affirmative,

I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress, which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The wagon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one* that serves *two hundred* persons."

Seven successive years did Cowper, in his excellent good nature, supply the clerk of All Saints in Northampton with his Mortuary verses.

But the most pleasing consequence of his celebrity was, that it occasioned the renewal of old friendships. "When I lived in the Temple," he says to his cousin,²⁵ "I was rather intimate with a son of the late Admiral Rowley, and a younger brother of the present admiral. Since I wrote to you last, I received a letter from him in a very friendly and affectionate style. It accompanied half a dozen books which I had lent him five-and-twenty years ago, and which he apologized for having kept so long, telling me that they had been sent to him at Dublin by mistake, for at Dublin it seems he now resides. Reading my poems, he felt, he said, his friendship for me revived, and wrote accordingly." That Mr. Rowley had always entertained a just opinion of Cowper's talents, and cherished an affectionate remembrance of him, appears by his having preserved the two earliest²⁶ of his letters which as yet have been discovered. And Cowper, who knew Rowley to be "one of the most benevolent and friendly creatures in the world," replied²⁷ to his unexpected reintroduction as cordially as he could have desired.

MY DEAR ROWLEY,

Weston Underwood, Feb. 21, 1788.

I have not, since I saw you, seen the face of any man whom I knew while you and I were neighbors in the Temple. From the Temple I went to St. Alban's, thence to Cambridge, thence to Huntingdon, thence to Olney, thence hither. At Huntingdon I formed a connection with a most

²⁵ Dec. 19, 1787.

²⁶ Vol. i. p. 26, 30.

²⁷ Some of the letters to Mr. Rowley are wanting in the collection with which I have been intrusted, and among them is the first after the renewal of their correspondence.

valuable family of the name of Unwin, from which family I have never since been divided. The father of it is dead; his only son is dead; the daughter is married and gone northward; Mrs. Unwin and I live together. We dwell in a neat and comfortable abode in one of the prettiest villages in the kingdom, where, if your Hibernian engagements would permit, I should be happy to receive you. We have one family here, and only one, with whom we much associate. They are Throckmortons, descendants of Sir Nicholas of that name, young persons, but sensible, accomplished, and friendly in the highest degree. What sort of scenery lies around us I have already told you in verse; there is no need, therefore, to do it in prose. I will only add to its printed eulogium, that it affords opportunity of walking at all seasons, abounding with beautiful grass-grounds, which encompass our village on all sides to a considerable distance. These grounds are skirted by woods of great extent, belonging principally to our neighbors above mentioned. I, who love walking, and who always hated riding,²⁸ who am fond of some society, but never had spirits that would endure a great deal, could not, as you perceive, be better situated. Within a few miles of us, both to the east and west, there are other families with whom we mix occasionally; but keeping no carriage of any sort, I cannot reach them often. Lady Hesketh (widow of Sir Thomas, whose name, at least, you remember) spends part of the year with us, during which time I have means of conveyance, which else are not at my command.

So much for my situation. Now, what am I doing? Translating Homer. Is not this, you will say, *actum agere*? But if you think again, you will find that it is not. At least, for my own part, I can assure you that I have never seen him translated yet, except in the Dog-Latin, which you remember to have applied to for illumination when you were a schoolboy. We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin. Not much less than thirty years since, Alston and I read Homer through together. We compared Pope with his original all the way. The

²⁸ See vol. i. p. 26.

result was a discovery, that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute, as a taste for Homer. After the publication of my last volume, I found myself without employment. Employment is essential to me; I have neither health nor spirits without it. After some time, the recollection of what had passed between Alston and myself in the course of this business struck me forcibly; I remembered how we had been disgusted; how often we had sought the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representative, and had found, instead of them, puerile conceits, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position. Neither did I forget how often we were on the point of burning Pope, as we burnt Bertram Montfitchet²⁹ in your chambers. I laid a Homer before me. I translated a few lines into blank verse; the day following a few more; and proceeding thus till I had finished the first book, was convinced that I could render an acceptable service to the literary world, should I be favored with health to enable me to translate the whole. The Iliad I translated without interruption. That done, I published Proposals for a subscription, and can boast of a very good one. Soon after, I was taken ill, and was hindered near a twelvemonth. But I have now resumed the work, and have proceeded in it as far as to the end of the fifteenth Iliad, altering and amending my first copy with all the diligence I am master of. For this I will be answerable that it shall be found a close translation; in that respect, as faithful as our language, not always a match for the Greek, will give me leave to make it. For its other qualifications, I must refer myself to the judgment of the public, when it shall appear. Thus I have fulfilled my promise, and have told you not only how I am at present occupied, but how I am likely to be for some time to come. The Odyssey I have not yet touched. I need not, I am confident, use any extraordinary arts of persuasion to secure to myself

²⁹ Some liquid has fallen upon the letter, and completely obliterated all but the initial and last syllable of this word. But the *Monthly Review*, for April, 1761, notices "The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfitchet, Esq. written by himself," as an humble imitation of *Tristram Shandy*.

your influence, as far as it extends. If you mention that there is such a work on the anvil in this country, in yours perhaps you will meet somebody now and then not disinclined to favor it. I would order you a parcel of printed proposals, if I knew how to send it. But they are not indispensably necessary. The terms are, two large volumes, quarto, royal paper, three guineas; common, two.

I rejoice that you have a post, which, though less lucrative than the labors of it deserve, is yet highly honorable, and so far worthy of you. Adieu, my dear Rowley. May peace and prosperity be your portion.

Yours, very affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

Mr. Rowley, as might be expected, after this renewal of intercourse, took no little interest in procuring subscribers for his friend; and he met with good success. "I am very sensible of your kindness," says Cowper, "and, considering our long separation, am sensible of it the more. Thou art the only one of all my Temple connections who have, or seem to have, adverted to me since I left them, seven-and-twenty years ago. From many others I have received numerous acts of kindness, but none from them."

At this time also it was that Mrs. King, whose name frequently appears among Cowper's correspondents, introduced herself to him by letter, as having been intimately acquainted with his brother. This lady was wife of the Rev. John King,³⁰ rector of Pertonhall,³⁰ in Bedfordshire,

³⁰ Not Dr. King, nor *Perton-Hall*, as erroneously printed by Dr. J. Johnson and Mr. Grimshawe.

It has been asserted, that "the perusal of Cowper's poems had been the means of conveying impressions of piety to this lady's mind, and it was to record her gratitude and to cultivate his acquaintance that she wrote to him." Certain readers might infer from these words, that Mrs. King was *converted* by Cowper's poems. But if any such insinuation be intended, it is merely gratuitous. Mrs. King was a pious and excellent woman, and had then been five-and-thirty years the happy wife of a clergyman.

More will be said of this lady in the notes to Cowper's Correspondence; the Rev. Dr. Gorham, of Maidenhead, to whom the letters addressed to her at this time appertain, having obligingly enabled me to print them from the originals, correctly and without mutilation, and favored me with two which have not before been published.

who was at Westminster with Cowper, but had had little acquaintance with him there, being three years his senior. He replied to it³¹ mournfully, but with cordial kindness, expressed a desire to become better acquainted with one who had been his brother's friend, and subscribed himself, "early as it might seem to say it," hers affectionately. Mentioning this communication to Mr. Newton, he said, "She is evidently a Christian, and a very gracious one. — I would she had you for a correspondent rather than me. One letter from you would do her more good than a ream of mine."

Cowper seems to have taken little pleasure in conversing with Mr. Newton's immediate successor in the curacy of Olney; it was therefore no loss to him when Mr. Scott was removed to the chaplaincy of the Lock Hospital, which in those days was a post of honor for preachers of his description. The curate who succeeded him is only mentioned as having let part of the vicarage to Lady Hesketh on her first visit to these parts. Moses Browne was then, at eighty-four, so confident in the unimpaired vigor of his hale old age, that he promised himself, as has before been said, a lease of ten years longer; before two had elapsed, his life-tenure was at an end, and the living was given to Mr. Bean, who, with more ability than Mr. Scott, and more discretion than Mr. Newton, was not inferior in piety to either. Cowper said of him, as soon as they had exchanged visits on his arrival, "He is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much; — a treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value."³² Three months later he writes to Mr. Newton, "Small as the distance from Olney is, it has too often the effect of a separation between the Beans and us. He is a man with whom, when I can converse at all, I can converse on terms perfectly agreeable to myself; who does not distress me with forms, nor yet disgust me by the neglect of them; whose manners are easy and natural, and his observations always sensible. I often, therefore, wish them nearer neighbors."

But Cowper had now no lack of society, and he was

³¹ Feb. 12, 1788.

³² To Lady Hesketh, March 12, 1788.

fully employed. In the preceding October, Johnson, who had probably been advised that it was expedient so to do, called his attention once more to the business of translation; a task to which he applied himself forthwith, and with such resolution, that he said to his young friend Mr. Rose,³³ "The necessity of applying myself with all diligence to a long work that has been but too long interrupted, will make my opportunities of writing rare in future. Ten months have passed since I discontinued my poetical efforts. I do not expect to find the same readiness as before, till exercise of the neglected faculty, such as it is, shall have restored it to me." Hill and Lady Hesketh were both apprehensive that he might resume his work too soon, and pursue it too closely. To the former he said in reply,³⁴ "I thank you for the solicitude that you express on the subject of my present studies. The work is undoubtedly long and laborious, but it has an end; and proceeding leisurely, with a due attention to the use of air and exercise, it is possible that I may live to finish it. Assure yourself of one thing, that though to a by-stander it may seem an occupation surpassing the powers of a constitution never very athletic, and at present not a little the worse for wear, I can invent for myself no employment that does not exhaust my spirits more. I will not pretend to account for this; I will only say that it is not the language of predilection for a favorite amusement, but that the fact is really so. I have even found that those plaything-avocations, which one may execute almost without any attention, fatigue me, and wear away, while such as engage me much, and attach me closely, are rather serviceable to me than otherwise."

To Lady Hesketh he says,³⁵ "You need not, my dear, be under any apprehensions lest I should too soon engage in the translation of Homer. My health and strength of spirits for this service are, I believe, exactly *in statu quo prius*. But Mrs. Unwin having enlarged upon this head, I will therefore say the less. Whether I shall live to finish it, or whether, if I should, I shall live to enjoy any fruit of my labors, are articles in my account of such extreme un-

³³ Oct. 19, 1787.³⁴ Nov. 16.³⁵ Oct. 27.

certainly, that I feel them often operate as no small discouragement. But uncertain as these things are, I yet consider the employment as *essential* to my *present* well-being, and pursue it accordingly. But had Pope been subject to the same alarming speculations,—had he, waking and sleeping, dreamt as I do,—I am inclined to think he would not have been my predecessor in these labors. For I compliment myself with a persuasion, that I have more heroic valor, of the passive kind, at least, than he had; perhaps than any man: it would be strange had I not, after so much exercise.”

Cowper did not know that Pope also was troubled with dreams while employed upon these labors; that the translation, which in his own case was the anodyne remedy, was in his predecessor's the cause of them; and that Homer, as if in vengeance for being so metamorphosed in his version, visited him like a nightmare. Pope's own account of these visitations had not then been published. “What terrible moments,” said he, “does one feel after one has engaged for a large work! In the beginning of my translating the Iliad, I wished any body would hang me a hundred times. The Iliad took me up six years, and during that time, and particularly the first part of it, I was often under great pain and apprehension. Though I conquered the thoughts of it in the day, they would frighten me in the night. I dreamed often of being engaged on a long journey, and that I should never get to the end of it. This made so strong an impression upon me, that I sometimes dream of it still;—of being engaged in the translation, of having got above half way through it, and being embarrassed, and under dread of never completing it.”³⁶

Pope acquired his love of Homer, in early boyhood, from Ogilby's translation;³⁷ in gratitude for which he ought not to have spoken contemptuously of him in the Dunciad,

³⁶ Spence's Anecdotes, pp. 28, 53.

³⁷ Sir William Forbes notices the remarkable fact, that Ogilby's Homer should have been “the first book by which Pope was initiated in poetry, and Ogilby's Virgil, the first book in English verse that Beattie met with. Beattie was made very happy, when, in the latter part of his life, a friend who knew this, presented him with a copy of the book.”—*Life of Beattie*, vol. i. p. 4.

even if Ogilby had not deserved rather to be held up as an example of laudable perseverance and moral worth. It was the story which charmed him in this version ; of the character of the original he could have perceived as little — as is to be perceived in his own. But Cowper, when he learned “the tale of Troy divine,” and followed Ulysses in his wanderings, was at the same time familiarized with the spirit of the Homeric poems ; and in his deep perception of their character and beauty, his undertaking originated. Pope has said that his impelling motive to a work not much suited to his inclination, “was purely the want of money³⁸ at a time when he had none, not even to buy books.” This was said in conversation ; and there is nothing derogatory in the plain truth thus bluntly told. His object was to render himself independent by employing his great talents in the way which was likely to procure for him the largest reward. With Cowper it was a labor of love. “This notable job,” said he, “is the delight of my heart, and how sorry shall I be when it is ended !”³⁹ The hope of profit was an after-thought with him.

Pope’s usual method was to take advantage of the first heat, and then to correct each book first by the original, next by other translations, and lastly to give it a reading for the versification only.”⁴⁰ Cowper appears never to have seen any preceding version, except Pope’s, to which he never looked for assistance of any kind. Both proceeded at nearly the same rate, and corrected with equal diligence.⁴¹ But Cowper never lost sight of the original in his corrections, and Pope utterly disregarded it ; the one endeavored to represent it as faithfully as he could, the other ambitiously labored to embellish and improve it.

It is remarkable that Cowper, who took as much pleasure in correcting his verses as in composing them, (when

³⁸ Spence’s Anecdotes, p. 64.

³⁹ To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 10, 1787.

⁴⁰ Spence’s Anecdotes, p. 41.

⁴¹ Pope says, “When I fell into the method of translating thirty or forty verses before I got up, and piddled with it the rest of the morning, it went on easily enough ; and when I was thoroughly got into the way of it, I did the rest with pleasure.” — *Spence*, p. 29.

his own taste and judgment were to be consulted, not those of others,) should have very much disliked transcribing them, though transcription frequently leads to corrections, which, if not so suggested, might probably never have been made. But having that dislike, it was singularly fortunate for him that his kind neighbors entered with the most friendly warmth into his pursuits, and performed this office for him. Mrs. Throckmorton solicited it when Lady Hesketh was gone, and she was his "lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter." Mr. George Throckmorton, when he was visiting his brother, was then the most active amanuensis; and, when the family were absent, the chaplain offered his service. Such assistance was needed, both as it saved his time, and spared his sight; for though he had once said, "One might almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world," the inflammation of the eyes, to which he had always been occasionally subject, compelled him sometimes to refrain from using them. But when this disease was removed, he was so busy a man, "that could I write," said he, "with both hands, and with both at the same time, verse with one, and prose with the other, I should not, even so, be able to despatch both my poetry and my arrears of correspondence faster than I have need. The only opportunities that I can find for conversing with distant friends, are in the early hour (and that sometimes reduced to half a one) before breakfast."⁴²

In the winter of 1787, Mrs. Unwin providentially escaped death, and such a death as must have given Cowper a shock which would probably have completely overthrown his intellect. "This morning," he writes to Lady Hesketh, "had very near been a tragical one to me, beyond all that have ever risen upon me. Mrs. Unwin rose as usual at seven o'clock. At eight she came to me, and showed me her bedgown, with a great piece burnt out of it. Having lighted her fire, which she always lights herself, she placed the candle upon the hearth. In a few moments it occurred to her, that if it continued there it might possibly set fire to her clothes, therefore she put it out. But in fact, though she had not the least suspicion of it, her clothes were on fire at

⁴² To Mr. Newton, June 5, 1788.

that very time. She found herself uncommonly annoyed by smoke, such as brought the water into her eyes. Supposing that some of the billets might be too forward, she disposed them differently ; but finding the smoke increase, and grow more troublesome, (for by this time the room was filled with it,) she cast her eye downward, and perceived, not only her bed-gown, but her petticoat on fire. She had the presence of mind to gather them in her hand, and plunge them immediately into the basin, by which means the general conflagration of her person, which must probably have ensued in a few moments, was effectually prevented. Thus was that which I have often heard from the pulpit, and have often had occasion myself to observe, most clearly illustrated ; that secure as we may sometimes seem to ourselves, we are in reality never so safe as to have no need of a superintending Providence. Danger can never be at a distance from creatures who dwell in houses of clay. Therefore take ' care of thyself, gentle Yahoo ! and may a more vigilant than thou care for thee ! ' ” ⁴³

Further particulars of this providential escape were mentioned in his relation of it to Mr. Newton — that Mrs. Unwin was kneeling, and had addressed herself to her devotions, when the thought struck her that, the candle being short, there might be some danger. The hole burnt in her clothes was as large as the sheet of paper on which he was writing. “ It is not,” said he, “ possible, perhaps, that so tragical a death should overtake a person actually engaged in prayer ; for her escape seems almost a miracle. Her presence of mind, by which she was enabled, without calling for help or waiting for it, to gather up her clothes, and plunge them, burning as they were, in water, seems as wonderful a part of the occurrence as any. The very report of fire, though distant, has rendered hundreds torpid and incapable of self-succor ; how much more was such a disability to be expected, when the fire had not seized a neighbor’s house, nor begun its devastations in our own, but was actually consuming the apparel that she wore, and seemed in possession of her person ! Thus,” he said, “ Providence had interposed to preserve him from the heaviest affliction that he could now

⁴³ Dec. 24. 1787.

suffer." And asking, in a subsequent letter, what would become of him in case he were to lose her, he added, "I have one comfort, and only one: bereft of that, I should have nothing left to lean on; for my spiritual props have long since been struck from under me."⁴⁴

This was said in one of those darker moods which seem to have come over him when he wrote to Mr. Newton, and to have made the act of writing to him an irksome duty, which he was always willing to put off. In one of his letters he says, "Mrs. Newton and you are both kind and just in believing that I do not love you less when I am long silent. Perhaps a friend of mine, who wishes me to have him always in my thoughts, is never so effectually possessed of the accomplishment of that wish, as when I have been long his debtor; for *then* I think of him not only every day, but day and night, and all day long. But I confess at the same time, that my thoughts of you will be more pleasant to myself when I shall have exonerated my conscience by giving you the letter so long your due. Therefore, here it comes; — little worth your having; but payment, such as it is, that you have a right to expect, and that is essential to my own tranquillity."

That Cowper and Mr. Newton had a true regard for each other is certain — a regard heightened on the one side by a feeling of gratitude, and on the other by that of commiseration. While their intercourse was colloquial, there was a warmth of affection in this regard; for Mr. Newton was a man of lively and vigorous intellect, with whom Cowper could converse upon those equal terms by which conversation is rendered easy and delightful. But the next door neighbor and familiar friend was not like the same person as the spiritual director who from a distance watched jealously over the conduct of his friend, and administered exhortation or reproof, as he thought meet. It has been seen that his interference was sometimes both unwarrantable and unwise. But if his letters, in their general complexion, were like those which he addressed to other persons, and which are printed among his works, they were not such as Cowper could have had any pleasure in receiving — not such as he requested

⁴⁴ To Mr. Newton, Oct. 15, 1791.

his friend Unwin to write — for Mr. Newton sermonized in his epistles. There is nothing epistolary about them except the beginning and the end.

On Cowper's part, therefore, the correspondence ceased to be pleasurable when time lessened the old feeling of familiarity; and at length, so often as he performed it as a duty, the cloud came over him. A Romanist who has any great sin to confess, or rummages his conscience for small ones to make up a passable account, enters the confessional with the satisfaction of knowing that at greater or less price of penance he shall obtain a discharge in full. But even to the legitimate influence which Mr. Newton might have exercised, Cowper turned a deaf ear. He had been encouraged to believe that there was nothing illusive in the raptures of his first recovery; and they who had confirmed him in that belief argued in vain against his illusions now, when they were of an opposite character: — such are the perilous consequences of religious enthusiasm. These dark imaginations, however, were far from having entire possession of him at this time. He was happy in his employment, in his change of abode, in the society of his excellent neighbors at Weston Hall, in the renewed intercourse with his relations, in the growth of his reputation, and the consciousness of the consideration which it had given him in their eyes and with the public, above all in the expectation of Lady Hesketh's annual return. That pleasure was postponed in consequence of her father's gradual decline — a circumstance alluded to in the following poem, which is here printed from the original,⁴⁵ as sent to Lady Hesketh:

BENEFACTIONS.

A POEM IN SHENSTONE'S MANNER.

ADDRESSED TO MY DEAR COZ, APRIL 14, 1788.

THIS cap, that so stately appears
With riband-bound tassel on high,
Which seems, by the crest that it rears,
Ambitious of brushing the sky;

⁴⁵ The copy from which it was published after his death had been greatly altered.

This cap to my Harriet I owe ;
 She gave it, and gave me, beside,
 A riband, worn out long ago,
 With which in its youth it was tied.

This chair, that I press at my ease,
 With tresses of steeds that were black,
 Well covered and wadded to please
 The sitter, both bottom and back ;
 Thick-studded with bordering nails,
 Smooth-headed, and gilded, and bright,
 As Vesper, who, when the day fails,
 Adorns the dark forehead of Night ; —

These carpets, so soft to the foot,
 Caledonia's traffic and pride,
 (O spare them, ye Knights of the Boot,
 Dirt-splashed in a cross-country ride!)
 This table and mirror within,
 Secure from collision and dust,
 At which I oft shave cheek and chin,
 And periwig nicely adjust ; —

This movable structure of shelves,
 Contrived both for splendor and use,
 And charged with octavos and twelves,
 The gayest I had to produce ;
 Where, flaming in scarlet and gold,
My poems enchanted I view,
 And hope in due time to behold
My Iliad and Odyssey too ; —

This china that decks the alcove,
 Which mortals have named a buffet,
 But what the gods call it above
 Has ne'er been revealed to us yet ;
 These curtains, that keep the room warm,
 Or cool, as the season demands ;
 Those stoves, which for figure and form
 Seem the labor of Mulciber's hands ; —

That range, from which many a mess
 Comes smoking the stomach to cheer ;
 That tub, (you might bathe in a less,)
 Where malt is transformed into beer ;
 These painted and unpainted chairs,
 Those cushioned, these curiously framed ;
 Yon bedding and bed above stairs,
 With other things not to be named ; —

These items endear my abode,
 Disposing me oft to reflect
 By whom they were kindly bestowed,
 Whom here I impatient expect.
 But, hush! She a parent attends,
 Whose dial-hand points to eleven,
 Who, oldest and dearest of friends,
 Waits only a passage to heaven.

Then willingly want her awhile,
 And, sweeping the chords of your lyre,
 The gloom of her absence beguile,
 As now, with poetical fire.
 'Tis yours, for true glory athirst,
 In high-flying ditty to rise
 On feathers renowned from the first
 For bearing a goose to the skies.

Mr. Rose, meantime, had visited him again, and was "assured of an undissembling welcome at all times," both on his own part and Mrs. Unwin's. "As to her," said Cowper, "she is one of the sincerest of the human race; and if she receives you with the appearance of pleasure, it is because she feels it. Her behavior on such occasions is with her an affair of conscience, and she dares no more look a falsehood than utter one."⁴⁶ Her daughter, Mrs. Powley, and her husband, came also to Weston; "her," he says, "we found much improved in her health and spirits; and him, as always, affectionate and obliging. It was an agreeable visit; and as it was ordered for me, I happened to have better spirits than I have enjoyed at any time since."⁴⁷

On the eve of their departure he wrote to Lady Hesketh, and complaining playfully that Mrs. Frog prolonged her stay in London, "It is true," he said, "that northerly winds have blown ever since she left us, but they have not prevented the most exuberant show of blossoms that ever was seen, nor the singing of nightingales on every hedge. Ah, my cousin, thou hast lost all these luxuries too; but not by choice; thine is an absence of necessity. The wilderness is now in all its beauty. I would that thou wert here to enjoy it!"⁴⁸

⁴⁶ March 29, 1788.⁴⁷ To Mr. Newton, June 5.⁴⁸ May 19.

Ashley Cowper died in the ensuing month, at the age of eighty-six. It is worthy of remark that Cowper's letters upon the occasion could not have been written under the influence of an uncharitable creed, nor of that insane persuasion which characterized his disease.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The Lodge, June 10, 1788.

Your kind letter of precaution to Mr. Gregson sent him hither as soon as chapel-service was ended in the evening. But he found me already apprized of the event that occasioned it, by a line from Sephus, received a few hours before. My dear uncle's death awakened in me many reflections, which for a time sunk my spirits. A man like him would have been mourned, had he doubled the age he reached. At any age his death would have been felt as a loss that no survivor could repair. And though it was not probable, that, for my own part, I should ever see him more, yet the consciousness that he still lived was a comfort to me. Let it comfort us now that we have lost him only at a time when nature could afford him to us no longer; that as his life was blameless, so was his death without anguish; and that he is gone to heaven. I know not that human life, in its most prosperous state, can present any thing to our wishes half so desirable as such a close of it.

Not to mingle this subject with others, that would ill suit with it, I will add no more at present, than a warm hope that you and your sister will be able effectually to avail yourselves of all the consolatory matter with which it abounds. You gave yourselves, while he lived, to a father, whose life was, doubtless, prolonged by your attentions, and whose tenderness of disposition made him always deeply sensible of your kindness in this respect, as well as in many others. His old age was the happiest that I have ever known, and I give you both joy of having had so fair an opportunity, and of having so well used it, to approve yourselves equal to the calls of such a duty in the sight of God and man.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, June 15, 1788.

Although I know that you must be very much occupied on the present most affecting occasion, yet, not hearing from you, I began to be uneasy on your account, and to fear that your health might have suffered by the fatigue, both of body and spirits, that you must have undergone, till a letter that reached me yesterday from the General set my heart at rest, so far as that cause of anxiety was in question. He speaks of my uncle in the tenderest terms, such as show how truly sensible he was of the amiableness and excellence of his character, and how deeply he regrets his loss. We have indeed lost one who has not left his like in the present generation of our family, and whose equal, in all respects, no future of it will probably produce. My memory retains so perfect an impression of him, that, had I been painter instead of poet, I could from those faithful traces have perpetuated his face and form with the most minute exactness; and this I the rather wonder at, because some, with whom I was equally conversant five-and-twenty years ago, have almost faded out of all recollection with me. But he made an impression not soon to be effaced, and was in figure, in temper, and manner, and in numerous other respects, such as I shall never behold again. I often think what a joyful interview there has been between him and some of his contemporaries, who went before him. The truth of the matter is, my dear, that they are the happy ones, and that we shall never be such ourselves till we have joined the party. Can there be any thing so worthy of our warmest wishes as to enter on an eternal, unchangeable state, in blessed fellowship and communion with those whose society we valued most, and for the best reasons, while they continued with us? A few steps more through a vain, foolish world, and this happiness will be yours. But be not hasty, my dear, to accomplish thy journey! For of all that live, thou art one whom I can least spare; for thou also art one who shalt not leave thy equal behind thee.

W. C.

He composed these lines also for a memorial of the good and happy old man :—

Farewell! endued with all that could engage
All hearts to love thee, both in youth and age!
In prime of life, for sprightliness enrolled
Among the gay, yet virtuous as the old;
In life's last stage, (O blessings rarely found!)
Pleasant as youth with all its blossoms crowned;
Through every period of this changeful state,
Unchanged thyself, wise, good, affectionate!
Marble may flatter; and lest this should seem
O'ercharged with praises on so dear a theme,
Although thy worth be more than half suppressed,
Love shall be satisfied, and veil the rest.

Cowper had written to Lord Thurlow at the same time as to Colman, upon issuing the Proposals for his Homer, and he had obtained no answer. But Lady Hesketh, who neglected nothing whereby she could possibly be the means of serving her cousin, wrote to the Chancellor without his knowledge, and by sending him the letter which she received in reply, opened a way for the renewal of their intercourse.

My dearest Coz! said Cowper,⁴⁹ he who has thee for a friend will never want a warm one. I send thee *verbatim* and *literatim* what I have sent to the Chancellor. His letter is very kind, and has given me much pleasure. Give my love to the generous Sir Archer,⁵⁰ whom I honor highly for his bounty, and assure yourself that I love thee dearly, and in every corner of my heart.

Adieu. Thine,
W. C.

MY LORD,

Your lordship will be very sure that though Lady Hesketh did not choose to apprize me of her intentions to write to you, she has not thought it necessary to observe the same secrecy with respect to your lordship's answer. The sight of your hand-writing (myself the subject) has

⁴⁹ Aug. 26, 1788.

⁵⁰ Sir Archer Croft, of Croft Castle, who married a sister of Lady Hesketh's.

awakened in me feelings which with *you* I know will be my sufficient apology for following her example. They are such as would make it difficult for me to be silent, were there any propriety in being so. But I see none. Why should I seem indifferent where I ought to be warm, and am so? and what honor would it do me to appear to have forgotten a friend who still affectionately remembers me?

Had my cousin consulted me before she made application to your lordship in my favor, I should probably, at the same time that I had both loved and honored her for her zeal to serve me, have discouraged that proceeding; not because I have no need of a friend, or because I have not the highest opinion of your constancy in that connection, but because I am sensible how difficult it must be even for *you* to assist a man in his fortunes who *can* do nothing but write verses, and who *must* live in the country. But should no other good effect even follow her application than merely what has already followed it, an avowal on your lordship's part that you still remember me with affection, I shall be always glad that she acted as she did: she has procured me a gratification of which I shall always feel the comfort while I have any sensibility left.

I know that your lordship would never have expressed even remotely a wish to serve me, had you not in reality felt one, and will therefore never lay my scantiness of income to your account, but should I live and die circumscribed as I am, and have been ever, in my finances, will impute it always to its proper cause, my own singularity of character, and not in the least to any deficiency of good will in your lordship's dispositions toward me.

I will take this opportunity to thank you for having honored my Homer with your subscription. In that work I labor daily, and now draw near to a close of the Iliad, after having been, except an intermission of eight months, occasioned by illness, three years employed in it. It seemed to me, after all Pope's doings, that we still wanted an English Homer; and may I but be happy enough to supply the defect, and to merit your lordship's approbation, I shall envy no poet on the earth at present, nor many that have gone before me.

I have the honor to be, my lord, your lordship's most obliged and affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

The Newtons paid him a visit at the latter end of summer. Cowper enjoyed their society ; but the letter which he wrote to Mr. Newton, after being apprized of his safe return to town, was in a diseased and ominous strain. "I found," said he, "those comforts in your visit which have formerly sweetened all our interviews, in part restored. I knew you ; knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the chief Shepherd feeds his flock, and felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever. But one thing was still wanting, and that thing the crown of all. I shall find it in God's time, if it be not lost forever. When I say this, I say it trembling ; for at what time soever comfort shall come, it will not come without its attendant evil ; and whatever good thing may occur in the interval, I have sad forebodings of the event, having learned by experience that I was born to be persecuted with peculiar fury, and assuredly believing, that such as my lot has been, it will be to the end. This belief is connected in my mind with an observation I have often made, and is perhaps founded, in great part, upon it ; that there is a certain *style* of dispensations maintained by Providence in the dealings of God with every man, which, however the incidents of his life may vary, and though he may be thrown into many different situations, is never exchanged for another. The style of dispensation peculiar to myself has hitherto been that of sudden, violent, unlooked-for change. When I have thought myself falling into the abyss, I have been caught up again ; when I have thought myself on the threshold of a happy eternity, I have been thrust down to hell. The rough and the smooth of such a lot, taken together, should perhaps have taught me never to despair ; but through an unhappy propensity in my nature to forebode the worst, they have, on the contrary, operated as an admonition to me never to hope. A firm persuasion that I can never durably enjoy a comfortable state of mind, but must be de-

pressed in proportion as I have been elevated, withers my joys in the bud, and, in a manner, entombs them before they are born ; for I have no expectation but of sad vicissitude, and ever believe that the last shock of all will be fatal."

These were dark forebodings ; yet they had not prevented him from enjoying the society of his friend, whose visit, he said to Lady Hesketh, had been very agreeable. Rose, who was always a welcome guest, became now a frequent one, performing his journeys on foot, with a confidence in his own strength, which Cowper warned him against presuming on too much. He was there during part of Mr. Newton's stay, and transcribed a book of the Iliad ; and, returning in October, rendered further assistance of the same kind. This able and amiable young man, then in his twenty-first year, had attached himself with great warmth of affection to Cowper, and became, as he well deserved to be, a favorite with him and with all his friends. Lady Hesketh was at Weston when he arrived, and the account of their way of life which he gave in a letter⁵¹ to his favorite sister, Harriet, will be read with pleasure by all who take an interest in Cowper's history.

Weston Lodge, Oct. 25, 1788.

"I am at length settled in the house of quiet happiness and undisturbed comfort, where I may say I enjoy myself with the most perfect enjoyment, and look forward to the period of my departure with melancholy regret. My arrival here was delayed nearly a week beyond my original plan, which I must lament, because I shall necessarily have less of Mr. Cowper's company. I came here on Thursday ; and here I found Lady Hesketh, a very agreeable, good-tempered, sensible woman, polite without ceremony, and sufficiently well bred to make others happy in her company. I here feel no restraint, and none is wished to be inspired. The 'noiseless tenor' of our lives would much please and gratify you. An account of one day will furnish you with

⁵¹ This is one of the communications for which I am obliged to Mr. William Farr Rose, of the Navy Pay Office, the son of Cowper's friend.

a tolerably accurate idea of the manner in which all our time is passed. We rise at whatever hour we choose; breakfast at half after nine, take about an hour to satisfy the *sentiment*, not the *appetite*, — for we talk — ‘good Heavens, how we talk!’ and enjoy ourselves most wonderfully. Then we separate, and dispose of ourselves as our different inclinations point; Mr. Cowper to Homer; Mr. R. to transcribing what is already translated; Lady Hesketh to work, and to books alternately; and Mrs. Unwin, who, in every thing but her face, is like a kind angel sent from heaven to guard the health of our poet, is busy in domestic concerns. At one, our labors finished, the poet and I walk for two hours. I then drink most plentiful draughts of instruction which flow from his lips, instruction so sweet, and goodness so exquisite, that one *loves* it for its flavor. At three we return and dress, and the succeeding hour brings dinner upon the table, and collects again the smiling countenances of the family to partake of the neat and elegant meal. Conversation continues till tea-time, when an entertaining volume engrosses our thoughts till the last meal is announced. Conversation again, and then rest before twelve, to enable us to rise again to the same round of innocent, virtuous pleasure. Can you wonder that I should feel melancholy at the thought of leaving such a family? or, rather, will you not be surprised at my resolution to depart from this quiet scene on Thursday next?”

At that time Cowper was as happy as he appeared to be. His health was better than it had been for many years. “Long time,” he says, “I had a stomach that would digest nothing, and now nothing disagrees with it; an amendment for which, I am, under God, indebted to the daily use of soluble tartar, which I have never omitted these two years.”⁵² Telling Rose, after his departure, that they were all in good health, and cheerful, he added, “This I say, knowing you will be glad to hear it, for you have seen the time when this could not be said of all your friends at Weston.”⁵³ The society of this young friend had been very agreeable

⁵² To Mr. Smith, Dec. 20, 1780.

⁵³ Nov. 30.

to him. "I have taken," said he, "since you went away, many of the walks which we have taken together ; and none of them, I believe, without thoughts of you. I have, though not a good memory in general, yet a good local memory, and can recollect, by the help of a tree or stile, what you said on that particular spot. For this reason I purpose, when the summer is come, to walk with a book in my pocket : what I read at my fireside I forget, but what I read under a hedge, or at the side of a pond, that pond and that hedge will always bring to my remembrance ; and this is a sort of *memoria technica*, which I would recommend to you if I did not know that you have no occasion for it."⁵⁴

The health of one of the party received a shock, when, during a frost, Mrs. Unwin slipped on the gravel walk, fell, and was so severely bruised below the hip, that she was for some time completely crippled ; indeed, she never recovered her former strength. At first, however, there was amendment enough to keep them in constant hope ; and Cowper's spirits continued cheerful after Lady Hesketh returned in January to town. His constant employment materially contributed to this. "I am the busiest man," said he to his cousin, "that ever lived sequestered as I do ; and am never idle. My days accordingly roll away with a most tremendous rapidity."⁵⁵

Happily, there was nothing irksome in any of the business to which he was called. His correspondence — except only when, upon writing to Mr. Newton, and to him alone, the consciousness of his malady arose in his mind — was purely pleasurable. He had his own affliction, and that was of the heaviest kind ; but from the ordinary cares and sorrows of life no man was ever more completely exempted. All his connections were prosperous. Mr. Unwin was the only friend whose longer life must have appeared desirable, of whom death bereaved him. From the time when, in the prime of manhood, he was rendered helpless, he was provided for by others ; that Providence which feeds the ravens raised up one person after another to minister unto him. Mrs. Unwin was to him as a mother ; Lady Hesketh as a sister,

⁵⁴ Jan. 19, 1789.

⁵⁵ Jan. 31

and when he lost in Unwin one who had been to him as a brother, young men, as has already been seen in the instance of Rose, supplied that loss with almost filial affection. Sad as his story is, it is not altogether mournful; he had never to complain of injustice, nor of injuries, nor even of neglect. Man had no part in bringing on his calamity; and to that very calamity which made him "leave the herd" like "a stricken deer," it was owing that the genius which has consecrated his name, which has made him the most popular poet of his age, and secures that popularity from fading away, was developed in retirement; it would have been blighted had he continued in the course for which he was trained up. He would not have found the way to fame, unless he had missed the way to fortune. He might have been happier in his generation; but he could never have been so useful; with that generation his memory would have passed away, and he would have slept with his fathers, instead of living with those who are the glory of their country and the benefactors of their kind.

The interruptions which took him sometimes from his regular and favorite occupation, were neither unwelcome nor unseasonable, occasional change being as salutary for the mind as for the body. It was suggested to him by his cousin that he might further a good cause by composing a poem upon the slave trade, which, by the unparalleled exertions of Clarkson, and the zeal and eloquence of Wilberforce, had been brought before the public so as to make a deep and permanent impression. But though it was a subject whereon he had more than once ruminated as he lay in bed, watching the break of day; and though it appeared to him so important at that juncture, and so susceptible of poetical management, that he felt inclined to start in that career, he said, could he have allowed himself to desert Homer long enough, yet upon seeing a poem by Hannah More, he dropped the half-formed inclination. Hannah More was a favorite writer with him; "she had more nerve and energy," he said, "both in her thoughts and language, than half the he-rhymers in the kingdom." And he was the more willing to forego the subject, considering that he had already borne his testimony in favor of his black breth-

ren, "and had been one of the earliest," he said, "if not the first, of those who had, in that day, expressed their detestation of that diabolical traffic." ⁵⁶

He had been asked to write songs upon the subject, as the surest way of reaching the public ear. And though at first he felt not at all allured to the undertaking, as thinking that it offered only images of horror by no means suited to that style of composition, yet after "turning the matter in his mind as many ways as he could," he produced five.⁵⁷ "If you hear ballads sung in the streets on the hardships of the negroes in the islands," he says to Rose,⁵⁸ "they are probably mine. It must be an honor to any man to have given a stroke to that chain, however feeble." There was only one of them with which he was himself satisfied; though "I have heard them," he says, "all well spoken of. But there are very few things of my own composition that I can endure to read when they have been written a month, though at first they seem to me to be all perfection."⁵⁹ There was another cause for his disliking these ballads. "Slavery," said he,⁶⁰ "and especially negro slavery, because the cruelest, is an odious and disgusting subject. Twice or thrice I have been assailed with entreaties to write a poem on that theme. But beside that it would be in some sort treason against Homer to abandon him for any other matter, I felt myself so much hurt in my spirits the moment I entered on the contemplation of it, that I have at

⁵⁶ Feb. 16, 1788.

⁵⁷ "Three," he says to General Cowper, "and that which appears to myself the best of those three I have sent you. Of the other two, one is serious, in a strain of thought perhaps rather too serious, and I could not help it. The other, of which the slave-trader is himself the subject, is somewhat ludicrous."

The Morning Dream is what he sent to the General; and he afterwards wrote two others, which are likewise printed among his poems. The one of which he said that perhaps it was rather too serious, has not (I believe) appeared. The other that he mentioned will be found in the Supplementary Notes to the present volume. I am obliged for it to Mr. Joseph Fletcher, jun. who has in his possession the original in Cowper's writing, given by him to his friend Mr. Bull, and by Mr. Bull as a relic to Mr. Fletcher's father.

⁵⁸ March 29, 1788.

⁵⁹ To Lady Hesketh, June 27, 1788.

⁶⁰ To Mr. Bagot, June 17.

last determined absolutely to have nothing more to do with it. There are some scenes of horror on which my imagination can dwell, not without some complacence; but then they are such scenes as God, not man, produces. In earthquakes, high winds, tempestuous seas, there is the grand as well as the terrible. But when man is active to disturb, there is such meanness in the design, and such cruelty in the execution, that I both hate and despise the whole operation, and feel it a degradation of poetry to employ her in the description of it. I hope also, that the generality of my countrymen have more generosity in their nature than to want the fiddle of verse to go before them in the performance of an act to which they are invited by the loudest calls of humanity."

Some years back, between the publication of his first and second volumes, he had been asked to contribute to a journal, the title of which does not appear. The application seems to have been made through Mr. Newton, to whom he replied, "From the little I have seen, and the much I have heard, of the manager of the Review you mention, I cannot feel even the smallest push of a desire to serve him in the capacity of a poet. Indeed, I dislike him so much, that, had I a drawer full of pieces fit for his purpose, I hardly think I should contribute to his collection. It is possible, too, that I may live to be once more a publisher myself, in which case I should be glad to find myself in possession of any such original pieces as might decently make their appearance in a volume of my own. At present, however, I have nothing that would be of use to him."

There was another journal at that time, called the Theological Miscellany, with which he was better pleased, and in which Mr. Newton was concerned. For this he was disposed to translate a book of Caraccioli's upon Self-Acquaintance—a chapter for each monthly number. If Mr. Newton thought such a contribution would be welcome, "a labor of that sort," he said, "would suit him better, in his then state of mind, than original composition on religious subjects." Upon further consideration, however, though he retained his liking for the book, he perceived that it was not sufficiently consonant with the principles upon which the journal was

established and conducted. From that time he seems never to have thought of contributing to any periodical work, except occasionally to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, till Johnson requested his assistance in the *Analytical Review*, then recently established. The original scheme of that Review, as projected by Mr. Thomas Christie, (a person equally remarkable for his attainments and his abilities,) was, that the contributors should affix their names to their respective articles; but upon further consideration, this part of the plan was abandoned, as being liable to objections not less weighty than those that may obviously be made against the ordinary practice.

The first number appeared in May, 1788, and in the February following Cowper was employed in reviewing *Glover's Athenaid*. That poet would have thought himself fortunate if he had known to whom this favorite work of his old age had been committed. For though Cowper calls himself a supercilious reader, he was in truth as candid as he was competent. Speaking of Mrs. Piozzi's *Travels*, he says in one of his letters, "It is the fashion, I understand, to condemn them. But we, who make books ourselves, are more merciful to bookmakers. I would that every fastidious judge of authors were himself obliged to write! there goes more to the composition of a volume than many critics imagine. I have often wondered that the same poet who wrote the *Dunciad* should have written these lines—

That mercy I to others show,
That mercy show to me.

Alas for Pope, if the mercy he showed to others was the measure of the mercy he received! He was the less pardonable too, because experienced in all the difficulties of composition."

"The *Athenaid*," says Cowper to his cousin,⁶¹ "sleeps while I write this. I have made tables of contents for twelve books of it, and have yet eight to analyze. I must then give somewhat like a critical account of the whole, as critical, at least, as the brevity it will be necessary to observe will allow. A poem consisting of twenty books could not,

⁶¹ Feb. 4, 1789.

perhaps, hope for many readers who would go fairly through it; and this has possibly missed a part of the praise it might have received, had the story been comprised within more reasonable limits. I am the more persuaded that this is the case, having found in it many passages to admire. It is condemned, I dare say, by those who have never read the half of it. At the same time, I do not mean to say that it is on the whole a first-rate poem; but certainly it does not deserve to be cast away as lumber, the treatment which, I am told, it has generally met with."

Cowper would not have deemed this poem unreasonably long unless he had felt it to be tedious; and perhaps it would not have seemed tedious to him if he had not undertaken to analyze it, and deliver a critical opinion upon its merits. A novel, in three such volumes as the *Athenaid*, is not complained of for its length; and they who cared nothing for its poetical merits or demerits, of which they knew nothing, might have been agreeably entertained by the story, and have found in it that amusement which is all that the generality of readers seek. But Glover had brooded over his hidden treasure too long. More than fifty years elapsed from the publication of *Leonidas* before this continuation, or second part, appeared as a posthumous work, three years after the author's decease. Had it been published while the reputation of the former poem was fresh, it might have pursued the triumph, and partaken the gale, for its merits are not inferior, and it has more variety of characters and of incident. But the success of *Leonidas*, like that of *Cato*, had been factitious, and though it had hitherto supported itself, it could not buoy up the *Athenaid*. Glover had been an influential man in the city at a time when parties in the state ran high, and were nearly equally poised; he was possessed of more than ordinary talents and learning, as well as great mercantile knowledge, and just weight of character; and the party with which he acted rewarded his services against Sir Robert Walpole's administration, by extolling a respectable poem far above its deserts. Those passions had long since passed away; the latter part of his public life had been highly creditable to him in every point of view; but it was not of a kind to captivate popular ap-

plause, nor was there any knot of statesmen who had an interest in keeping up his celebrity : — when that has fallen asleep, the temporary interest that may be excited by an author's death, is not sufficient to revive it. His poems, nevertheless, well deserve to be included in the next great collection of the English poets, and it is to be regretted that the whole of his works have not been collected.

"This reviewing business," said Cowper, "I find too much an interruption of my main concern, and, when I return the books to Johnson, shall desire him to send me either authors less impatient, or no more ⁶² till I have finished Homer." ⁶³ Occasional verses, on public events, or incidents arising in his own little circle, took up some portion of his time. These he was fond of writing, — seeing and partaking in the pleasure they gave to the persons to whom they were addressed, and to those acquainted with the circumstances that gave rise to them. Lady Hesketh, proud of his fame, and eager for any thing which she thought likely to extend it, advised him to think of another volume. He replied, "I have considered, and had, indeed, before I received your last, considered of the practicability of a new publication ; and the result of my thoughts on that topic is, that with my present small stock of small pieces the matter is not feasible. I have but few, and the greater part of those few have already appeared in the magazine — a circumstance which of itself would render a collection of them, at this time, improper. It is, however, an increasing fund ; and a month perhaps seldom passes in which I do not add something to it. In time their number will make them more important, and in time possibly I may produce something *in itself* of more importance ; then all may be packed off to the press together ; and in the interim, whatsoever I may write shall be kept secret among ourselves, that, being new

⁶² There is no other mention of his engagement with the *Analytical Review* in the letters which have come to my hands. But in July 1791, he speaks of "loose cash in the hands of his bookseller," — "a purse at Johnson's to which, if need should arise, he could recur at pleasure." — As the bargain for his *Homer* had not then been concluded, and he had given away the copyright of his two volumes, this I think must allude to the proceeds of his reviewing.

⁶³ To Lady Hesketh, Feb. 15, 1789.

to the public, it may appear, *when* it appears, with more advantage." ⁶⁴

In another letter to the same dear kinswoman he says, "Running over what I have written, I feel that I should blush to send it to any but thyself. Another would charge me with being impelled by a vanity from which my conscience sets me clear, to speak so much of myself and my verses as I do. But I thus speak to none but thee, nor to thee do I thus speak from any such motive. I egotize in my letters to thee, not because I am of much importance to myself, but because to thee both Ego, and all that Ego does, is interesting. God doth know that when I labor most to excel as a poet, I do it under such mortifying impressions of the vanity of all human fame and glory, however acquired, that I wonder I can write at all." ⁶⁵

His greatest pleasure was in the society of those whom he loved. When Rose's visit in the summer of this year was postponed from June till August, he said to him, "A month was formerly a trifle in my account; but at my present age, I give it all its importance, and grudge that so many months should yet pass in which I have not even a glimpse of those I love, and of whom, the course of nature considered, I must ere long take leave forever.—But I shall live till August." ⁶⁶ When Lady Hesketh arrived, he said, "This is the third meeting that my cousin and we have had in this country; and a great instance of good fortune I account it, in such a world as this, to have expected such a pleasure thrice without being once disappointed." ⁶⁷ And after both had departed, at the commencement of winter, his observation was, "When a friend leaves us in the beginning of that season, I always feel in my heart a *perhaps*, importing that we have possibly met for the last time, and that the robins may whistle on the grave of one of us before the return of summer." ⁶⁸

But it was his lot, happy indeed in this respect, to form new friendships as he advanced in years, instead of having to mourn for the dissolution of old ones by death. During

⁶⁴ April 14, 1789.

⁶⁵ June 6, 1789.

⁶⁶ June 20.

⁶⁷ To Mr. Rose, July 23.

⁶⁸ Jan. 3, 1790.

seven-and-twenty years he had held no intercourse with his maternal relations, and knew not whether they were living or dead ; the malady which made him withdraw from the world seems, in its milder consequences, to have withheld him from making any inquiry concerning them ; and from their knowledge he had entirely disappeared till he became known to the public. One of a younger generation was the first to seek him out. This was Mr. John Johnson, grandson of his mother's brother, Roger Donne, who had been rector of Catfield, in Norfolk. The youth was then a Cambridge student, and made the best use of a Christmas vacation by seeking and introducing himself to his now famous kinsman. Cowper's latent warmth of family feeling was immediately quickened ; and he conceived an affection for "the wild, but bashful boy," as he called him, which increased in proportion as he knew him more, and which was amply requited.

Young Johnson had some poetical ambition at that time ; he brought with him a manuscript poem of the pastoral kind, entitled the *Tale of the Lute, or the Beauties of Audley End*, and he produced it as coming from Lord Howard, with his lordship's request that Cowper would revise it. Cowper read it attentively, was much pleased with some parts, equally disliked others, and told him so "in such terms as one naturally uses when there seems to be no occasion to qualify or to alleviate censure." — It then came out that the youth was himself the writer, — that Lord Howard not approving it altogether, and some friends of his own age having, on the contrary, commended it highly, he had come to a resolution of abiding by the judgment of the author of the *Task* — a measure to which Lord Howard had indeed advised him. Upon his expressing afterwards, by letter, some degree of compunction for this artifice, Cowper replied, "Give yourself no trouble on the subject of the politic device you saw good to recur to, when you presented me with your manuscript. It was an innocent deception ; at least it could harm nobody save yourself — an effect which it did not fail to produce ; and since the punishment followed it so closely, by me at least it may very well be forgiven. You ask how I can tel'

that you are not addicted to practices of the deceptive kind. And, certainly, if the little time that I have had to study you were alone to be considered, the question would not be unreasonable; but in general a man who reaches my years finds

‘That long experience does attain
To something like prophetic strain.’

“I am very much of Lavater’s opinion, and am persuaded that faces are as legible as books, only with these circumstances to recommend them to our perusal, that they are read in much less time, and are much less likely to deceive us.” With regard to the poem itself, he gave him this golden advice — “Remember that, in writing, perspicuity is always more than half the battle. The want of it is the ruin of more than half the poetry that is published. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning, because nobody will take the pains to poke for it.”

This ardent youth took with him, on his departure, several books of Homer to transcribe, volunteering his services in this way; he took also a letter of introduction to Lady Hesketh, who was as much pleased with him as Cowper had been. He had observed with what affection Cowper spoke of his mother; the only portrait of her was in possession of her niece, Mrs. Bodham, who had been a favorite cousin of Cowper’s, in her childhood; and upon the youth’s report of his visit on his return home, this picture was sent to Weston, as a present, with a letter from his kinswoman, written in the fulness of her heart. It was replied to with kindred feeling, thus: —

TO MRS. BODHAM.

MY DEAREST ROSE,

Weston, Feb. 27, 1790.

Whom I thought withered, and fallen from the stalk, but whom I find still alive: nothing could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant

from her : I love you, therefore, and love you much, both for her sake and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me, as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt, had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year ; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper ; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the days of my childhood much to resemble my mother ; and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed to be a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability ; and a little, I would hope, both of his and of her —, I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St. Paul's, and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is, that whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy, your nephew, to my knowledge ; and that, breaking through all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest cousin, what shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation ? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done, perhaps, and it will answer to

us just as well : you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not ? The summer is at hand ; there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you all together, for want of house-room ; but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room, and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me ; she was my play-fellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so ! Neither do I at all forget my cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister, and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you, she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr. Bodham for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs. Unwin's kind respects, am,

My dear, dear Rose, ever yours,

W. C.

P. S. — I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres, whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

Still another P. S. — I find, on consulting Mrs. Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we have not only room for you, and Mr. Bodham, but for two of your sex, and even for your nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

Your nephew tells me, that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you ; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

Upon receiving this portrait of his mother, Cowper composed the most beautiful of his minor poems — a poem which he tells us he had more pleasure in writing than any

that he had ever wrote, one excepted; "that one," he says, "was addressed to a lady who has supplied to me the place of my own mother — my own invaluable mother — these six-and-twenty years. Some sons may be said to have had many fathers; but a plurality of mothers is not common."⁶⁹ The following Sonnet must be the piece to which he alludes.

Mary! I want a lyre with other strings;
 Such aid from Heaven as some have feigned they drew!
 An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
 And undebased by praise of meaner things!
 That ere through age or woe I shed my wings
 I may record thy worth, with honor due,
 In verse as musical as thou art true, —
 Verse that immortalizes whom it sings!
 But thou hast little need; there is a book
 By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
 On which the eyes of God not rarely look!
 A chronicle of actions, just and bright!
 There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine;
 And since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine.

At this time Mrs. Unwin was afflicted with almost constant headaches, and a pain in the side, the cause of which was not understood; her lameness consequent upon her fall was very little amended, but her looks had not altered for the worse, "and her spirits," Cowper said, "were good, because supported by comforts which depend not on the state of the body." The time came when she was rendered, by infirmities of mind and body, as unlike her former self in other things, as she now was in strength.

There must have appeared a great amendment in Cowper's notions concerning his own spiritual state, after his last recovery; otherwise Mr. Bull, who was always a judicious friend, would not have requested him to compose a hymn. The application reached him, however, in a dark hour, and he replied thus:⁷⁰ "My dear friend, ask possibilities, and they shall be performed, but ask not hymns from a man suffering by despair as I do. I could not sing the Lord's song were

* To Mrs. King, March 12, 1790. Certainly Cowper would not thus have spoken of Mrs. Unwin, if there had ever been any matrimonial engagement between them.

⁷⁰ May 25, 1788.

it to save my life, banished as I am, not to a strange land, but to a remoteness from his presence, in comparison with which the distance from east to west is no distance, — is vicinity and cohesion. I dare not, either in prose or verse, allow myself to express a frame of mind which I am conscious does not belong to me ; least of all can I venture to use the language of absolute resignation, lest, only counterfeiting, I should for that very reason be taken strictly at my word, and lose all my remaining comfort. Can there not be found among those translations of Madame Guyon somewhat that might serve the purpose ? I should think there might. Submission to the will of Christ, my memory tells me, is a theme that pervades them all. If so, your request is performed already ; and if any alteration in them should be necessary, I will with all my heart make it. I have no objection to giving the graces of the foreigner an English dress, but insuperable ones to all false pretences and affected exhibitions of what I do not feel.”

In the ensuing year, Mr. Bean found him in a happier mood, and obtained from him a hymn to be sung by the children of the Olney Sunday School, at a time when Cowper said “he was somewhat in the case of lawyer Dowling in *Tom Jones*, and, could he split himself into as many poets as there are Muses, could have found employment for them all.” Encouraged, perhaps, by this, Mr. Newton asked him to translate for publication a series of letters, which he had received from a Dutch clergyman at the Cape of Good Hope. Though so much additional occupation came inconveniently, when he had little time to spare from his *Homer*, Cowper could not refuse this to Mr. Newton ;⁷¹ and he had no objection to being known as the translator ; “rather,” said he, “I am ambitious of it as an honor. It will serve to prove, that if I have spent much time to little purpose, in the translation of *Homer*, some small portion of my time has, however, been well disposed of.”⁷²

Mr. Newton acted with the kindest intentions toward his

⁷¹ To Mrs. King, June 14, 1790.

⁷² To Mr. Newton, Oct. 15, 1790.

poor friend, when he put these letters into his hands. There is nothing remarkable in the early part of the writer's history. His name was Van Lier; he was born in 1764, "of worthy parents and of respectable condition;" he was destined by them to the ministry, and educated accordingly; and in his boyhood he became strongly attached to a beautiful girl of his own age, whose family were intimate with his. To this lady, who is called Miss E., he made a declaration, by letter, from the university, and received for answer, that she could take no step in an affair of that sort without the knowledge and consent of her parents. This wounded his pride; he made advances to another lady, from whom he received a similar answer; then, having frequent opportunities of seeing his first love, and finding that she had refused other offers, he soon ascertained that he was not indifferent to her, and obtained a promise of her hand, should the parents of both prove favorable to his wishes. "I was now," he said, "elevated to the pinnacle of joy; I accounted myself completely happy; and my heart! alas, full of idolatry, looked for felicity to the creature, regarding lightly the Creator, who is over all, blessed forever."

At this time he describes himself as full of hatred, envy, and malice, destitute of religion, and vicious, though externally seeming to deserve the praise of much decency. But among his scanty remains of virtue, ("if any virtue," says he, "I had,) I still possessed a compassionate and beneficent disposition. I could not think much of any man oppressed with want and misery without painful sympathy. If the poor applied to me for relief, I assisted them willingly and gladly, and had sometimes a lively and grateful sense of my privilege. Yet even on such occasions I adverted not to the commandment of God, nor proposed to myself his glory as my object, but obeyed merely the dictates of natural instinct and sensibility." He had not indeed dived in the mud of German metaphysics, but he had dabbled in the puddles of French philosophy.⁷³ Still there was in his heart of hearts a living and preserving principle.

⁷³ Among the works which were very hurtful to him, those of Enicdenus and Voltaire are specified. Enicdenus belongs to the same *Pro-pria quæ maribus* as Mules Quince, (vol. i. p. 6, n.) But in the pres-

"Certain it is," says he, "that unless God had forbidden and interposed by his grace to prevent it, I should in all probability have gone forth a declared enemy of revelation, at least of all true and spiritual religion. In the mean time I was accustomed frequently to pray at night on my bed, and in a phrase and manner perfectly opposite to my own opinions. Among other things I asked for conversion, using ordinarily these words: 'Draw me, O Lord, and I will run after thee! convert me, and I shall be converted!' — a singular instance of God's overruling power. My prayer evidently contradicted my own ideas and opinions, and I asked that which I neither believed possible nor desirable. I prayed also for God's assistance that I might grow in talents and in wisdom, that my studies might prosper, that the projects with which pride and ambition prompted me might have good success, and that my love of Miss E. might have consequences answerable to my wishes. Finally, I prayed that my parents, kindred, tutors, and friends, might all be objects of the divine benediction. Sometimes, through sleepiness, or other hinderances, my prayers were either sadly interrupted, or altogether neglected; but it cost me little regret or solicitude. While I prayed in this manner, it generally happened that my mind was extraordinarily agitated, and I experienced great emotion; nor can I doubt that I was occasionally much assisted by what are termed the common operations of the Holy Spirit. During these exercises, if I mistake not, I was wont to represent to myself the divine presence as a glorious light in heaven, like that of the sun, which light seemed visible to my imagination. My devotions of this kind were accompanied with great fervor, and even with a species of joy. Yet I have cause to believe that they were sometimes followed by a more daring and presumptuous commission of sin, for (the duty once performed) I seemed to have acquired a right to sin at my ease, and without disturbance.

"At this time I was sickly and debilitated. A sudden

ent case I can only guess that this may be a printer's *alias* for Helvetius,—the shallowest coxcomb that ever employed his little wit in endeavoring to degrade and corrupt his fellow-creatures.

dread of death would occasionally torment me, especially in the evening, and when I was alone. I often had a singular notion that death would be particularly unwelcome and terrible to me in the dusk of evening, or in the night, or even in a gloomy day ; but that I could die willingly and gladly under a bright sun and a serene sky. These sudden alarms and terrors, however, produced no fruit. I neither know nor believe that at this time I had any thoughts at all of the necessity of regeneration and faith in Christ. My meditations were unfrequent, and such were my religious affections ; accordingly they were never effectual to beget in me an earnest desire of a new heart, or of recovering the lost favor of God."

And now, by studying the works of Turretine, he became convinced of God's providence, the authority of Scripture, and consequently the truth of revelation. At times he was moved, in his solitary meditations, to tears, though his heart "was still like the stony ground." "*Communion with God, and the enjoyment of him*, were expressions," he says, "with which I could hardly connect an idea ; at least no such idea as would in any measure explain to me, why, and for what reason, the enjoyment of God is to be preferred to all the pleasures of the world, and to all enjoyment of the creature. — Sometimes, however, when, in a clear night, I saw the heavens spangled with stars, which I represented to myself as so many suns and worlds, I felt an ardent desire to be there ; and, goaded by extreme curiosity, imagined it a most desirable and delightful privilege to spend an eternity in the contemplation of those systems. And could there but be a hope, (which at that time appeared, and still appears to me, not impossible,) that after death the soul may be at liberty to visit and to make her remarks on that immense variety of worlds, then indeed I accounted a place in heaven a prize for which it became me to contend with unremitting earnestness."

In this state of mind he wrote a dissertation, at which he afterwards wondered much, for it seemed to have come from a mind seriously impressed with the importance of religion ; and as he wrote rapidly, and without books, he marvelled how he should have stumbled upon such thoughts as were

expressed there. "Among other matter," said he, "I reprehended and earnestly exhorted those who deny the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit, gravely expressing a wish that they may soon learn the reality of them from their own undoubted experience. Such was my wish for them ; and, wretched creature that I was ! I had neither the least knowledge or experience of that blessing myself, nor any care to acquire it."

He held then an office in the University ; but during a vacation, though there were occupations which seemed to require his presence in college, he availed himself of some fair pretext for going home, because Miss E. was in his father's neighborhood. It was agreed between them that in about two years he should accept a certain cure which had been offered him. Both were happy in the prospect ; "but the purpose of God," says Van Lier, "was different ; and, blessed be his name forever ! our purposes vanished like smoke, while his stood fast, and he performed all his pleasure." Not many days afterwards, his betrothed began to show evident marks of declining health ; she was soon confined to her bed, and every day diminished the hopes of her recovery. "When, on my daily inquiry," he says, "I was informed either that she was no better, or that her distemper rather increased, a sword seemed to pass through my heart, and, harassed by inexpressible fears, what I should do I knew not. I prayed to my unknown God for the restoration of her health. Never, I think, shall I pray again with equal earnestness. Her disease raged daily more and more, and in a short time the danger became imminent. My terrors and agitations of mind, keeping pace with her illness, had by this time increased to such a degree, that it became necessary for me, lest I should fall into absolute desperation, to contrive some employment or other, by which my distracted mind might in some measure be diverted to other objects. I determined to write a sermon, and, with consent of the minister of the place, to deliver it in public. A few days before the appointed time of delivery, I proceeded thus : I chose my text, spent some days in meditation on it, wrote down my thoughts, and committed the whole to memory. Thus I had not much leisure to

advert to other things. The violence of my distress was at least alleviated, and my attention directed elsewhere. At the time fixed I mounted the pulpit. — (It was his first attempt as a preacher.) — The Lord did not suffer me (as justly and deservedly I might have been, for my rashness and irreverence) to be put to shame. I preached with much applause, and possibly not without some effect. On this and the following day the distemper seemed very much abated, and the health of Miss E. so far restored that I hoped in a short time to witness her complete recovery. My joy now was proportioned to the pangs I had suffered. I saw her, and with great pleasure declared to her my former dread and anxiety on her account, as well as my present sincere delight in the assurance I seemed to have of her restoration. After this, while they were carrying her to her bed, she looked at me with eyes expressive of singular affection, full of the tenderest meaning, and fixed on me with an extraordinary seriousness of attention. From that hour I was never permitted to see her. The joy that I had conceived proved transient as it was sudden. The disease returned on her with redoubled force, and raged to such a degree that her sufferings were extreme. The next day, to the best of my remembrance, a physician of the first eminence was called in: he pronounced immediately her distemper most alarming, and so dangerous that he entertained very little hopes of her recovery. These words sounded in my ears like a terrible clap of thunder. In truth, my condition was most unhappy, agitated as my mind was with extreme terror, and torn with unutterable grief. I labored, but it was with the utmost difficulty that I prevailed, to conceal in some measure the fearful state of my mind. In the mean time I had a horrible prospect before me of being present at her death — a prospect that I could not bear to contemplate. I determined to leave her, and to depart suddenly from the place. Neither her condition, nor the state of my own mind, would allow me to bid her adieu. Accordingly, without her knowledge, overwhelmed with sorrow and dejection, I abandoned my home, and returned to the University."

His first business there was to search the works of a

foreign physician, in which he remembered once to have read an account of the disease which now threatened to be fatal to his happiness. And finding a mode of treatment recommended there, which was little used in his own country, he wrote immediately to request it might be tried, and prayed with extraordinary affection that these remedies might have a good effect, and that she, without whom life seemed impossible to himself, might be restored. Sorrow and love combined taught him to pray fervently; he offered his supplications in various manners, and urged them on various pleas, and sometimes flattered himself that the means would be attended with the desired success. On the third day after his return to college, news came that she was not worse, and that his prescription would be used, if the physician had no objection; but a few hours only elapsed before a friend of the family called upon him with the tidings of her death.

At this he controlled himself so strongly, that he appeared to feel less than had been expected; but secretly he was in a state of desperation, and his mind so stunned as to have lost all power of reflection. Soon, however, he bestirred himself, walked forth, called on one and another, and thought of taking a short journey in hopes of some recreation; but the good providence of God, he says, would not suffer it. He then purchased some religious books which were at that time in high reputation; Walker's Sermons and Blair's were among them; but the one which first engaged his attention was Lavater's Prospect of Eternity. "A little hope dwelt in me," he proceeds, "that after death I should meet Miss E. again — a hope that sometimes supported and refreshed me. For that reason I searched diligently the writings of Lavater for arguments favorable to the opinion that we should know each other in a future life, and that the relations which obtain between us here will not entirely cease hereafter. At the same time I prayed to God that he would mitigate and do away the excessive sorrow with which I was tormented. But not one thought had I of faith in Christ and conversion." He had wished nothing so much as that he might be released by a sudden stroke from a life which had now become hate-

ful; but Lavater's book soothed and strengthened him. He found more alleviation in reading religious works than in any other employment; and in this mood of mind, while musing over the Meditations of a certain Socinian, or rather Skeptic, on the principal truths of natural religion, which pleased him greatly by the elegant simplicity of the style, he found, most unexpectedly, a consolation which he had neither sought nor dreamt of. The case is singularly curious, and the whole narrative bears the stamp of sincerity.

"I was employed," says the happy writer, "in reading this Socinianizing or skeptical author; I read him with close attention, and was absorbed in the meditations that he suggested. Suddenly awakened, as I may say, out of those musings, I thought on God and his works. An idea altogether extraordinary of the glory and majesty of God struck me. I had never in such manner represented God to myself as now. The eyes of my understanding being enlightened, I observed and admired in all his works to which I adverted, his stupendous power, wisdom, and goodness. I had in my mind an apprehension of the splendor of his glory and presence perfectly new to me. It was not so much a *notion* that my illuminated intellect entertained of his infinite majesty and perfections, as it was a *sense* of them; they were so present to me that I *felt* them. The glory of his infinite Godhead and presence filled me with delight; and I saw so clearly his supreme worthiness of all my love and obedience, that my mind was carried by a sweet and irresistible force to love him with sincerity; and my heart, broken at the sight, abhorred its former ingratitude. I instantly conceived the purpose of a total reform in my conduct, of a universal attention to all his commandments, and to take them for my rule of life thenceforth without any exception. This appeared to me not only perfectly just and right, but easy also, and pleasant. I seemed to myself to have been hitherto the blindest and most ungrateful of creatures, who had never formed to myself such views of God before, who had neither loved nor obeyed him."

"From that memorable day my condition became widely different, and my course of life also.—I had acquired new

ideas of God, of myself, of the vanity of earthly things, and of the inestimable value of grace and divine communion. I was translated, as it were, into a new world. Christ lived in me, although till then I had not known him, and thus I became a new creature. Old things had passed away, and all things were become new. In short, it is easier to conceive than to express what passed in my mind on the occasion.—Taught, therefore, by undoubted experience, I hence concluded that I had obtained, by the incomprehensible and effectual grace of God, that new birth, without which no man can see or enter the kingdom of God, and of which, formerly, I had neither the desire, nor even the thought. My ideas now of the infinite excellence and loveliness of God, were lively and perspicuous. Such also were my apprehensions of my duty towards him, of my own excessive ingratitude and disobedience, and of God's powerful and unmerited grace, by which he had quickened me. Fears of the divine wrath I had none; no dread of punishment. That I deserved it indeed, and was utterly unworthy of his favor, I saw plainly; notwithstanding which, I never for a moment supposed myself an object of divine wrath, or feared lest I should suffer the punishment that I had deserved. It was a subject on which anxiety, fear, doubt, had no place in me. A lively perception of the divine glory and beauty, an unspeakable sense of his gracious presence, an experimental acquaintance with the delight that belongs to an effectual love to him,—these things secured me from all such terrors, and filled me with exceeding joy. In such a state of mind I could not doubt one moment concerning my admittance to the divine favor and communion, for I had sensible experience of both; knowing myself, however, at the same time unworthy of them, and unable to account for the grant of them to *me*, otherwise than in virtue of the blood and spirit of Christ alone, the Son of God, and only Savior of sinners."

One remarkable circumstance in Van Lier's story is, that though love had been "the scale by which to heavenly love he had ascended,"⁷⁴ no sooner had this new view of religion

⁷⁴ Milton.

opened upon him, than his grief abated, and in fact almost entirely ceased. His mind was altogether engaged in other matters, and he could, with his whole heart, give thanks to God for that very deprivation which only a few days before had driven him almost to despair. The change was as effectual as it was sudden; he declares that from the moment when it befell, he never doubted, for a single hour, his vocation at that time from death to life, and from darkness into marvellous light; in so wonderful a manner had his prayers for an alleviation of his affliction been heard. Had he not seen and conversed with his beloved so short a time before her death, his sorrow would not have been so poignant; had he remained, and been present at her death, it would have entirely overpowered him; had he taken a journey, as he proposed, the grief that urged him to read, meditate, and pray, would probably, he says, have soon lost much of its force; had it been more intense, it would have become downright desperation; had it been less so, business and society would soon have dissipated it; wonderful he deemed it that he should have been impelled to purchase books, of which he heard only by accident exactly at that crisis; and most wonderful of all that it should have pleased God to give him the light of his own spirit, while he was reading a book, which, under a Christian title, contained much unchristian matter, and in which the divinity and satisfaction of Christ were both controverted.

As yet, however, he had no spiritual knowledge of many of the most important truths; on these he roved at random, and when he thought of our Savior, his ideas were deeply tinctured with the opinions either of the Arians or Socinians. "The Savior," he says, "dwelt in me, as I may say, unknown to me, and held my eyes that I might not know him yet; although I was made partaker of his life, and as a member of his mystical body, derived from him, as from the head of that body, however unconscious of it, all the illumination, comfort, or spiritual strength that I enjoy.— While I was occupied in reading and considering the truths of God, even my body would be remarkably affected by the affections and enjoyments of my mind. My bosom seemed dilated as with the warmth of a gentle fire, which

diffused through my whole frame the most agreeable sensations. In truth there was a wonderful intercourse between soul and body. As often as in the Scriptures, or the Socinian tract, or in Walker's or Blair's Sermons, I found mention made of Jesus, and meditated on him, on his life, his sufferings, and his righteousness, or on the privilege of union with him, I perceived my mind affected with sensible consolation and delight; yet it was not illuminated on these subjects, but rather much beclouded."

In this stage of his progress it appeared to him so possible that the Arminian, or even Socinian doctrines should be the true, that he had resolved, in case they should appear so, upon diligent investigation, to embrace them, and renounce the Calvinistic church, painful as this must certainly prove to his parents and relations, and ruinous probably to himself. Whatever theological knowledge he had obtained, "was merely," he said, "superficial, natural, human. A spiritual apprehension of them was what I wanted; and had it pleased God to withhold from me those sensible consolations, and to hide his face from me, without all question I had also had my terrors, my anguish, and my doubts, having no truly spiritual views of Jesus, or confidence in his blood and righteousness. But the Divine Wisdom took a different course. I was for a time permitted constantly to behold the face of God as that of a gracious Father. As often as the day returned, in my prayers, thanksgivings, contemplations and meditations on the works of God and on his infinite glory, I was filled with heavenly joy, and with the sweetest intimations of his presence. Thus, therefore, under an affecting sense of his kindness, and indulged in the blessedness of communion with him, it was not possible that I should suffer fear or dread, or that I should doubt my eternal salvation, feeling, as I did, so sensibly the very principles of it within me."

It was now his delight to contemplate the visible creation; every day he attempted to represent to himself, by force of imagination, in a lively manner, this globe of earth, suspended with its atmosphere in ether, revolving at once around the sun and its own axis. — Then calling imagination home, he endeavored to impress his mind with an idea

of himself, as a skeleton, clothed with muscles and nerves, furnished with exquisite, sensitive organs, with a multiplicity of instruments artfully constructed and adapted to many admirable uses, and in which skeleton resides *this self*, that is, the reasonable soul, connected with it by an unintelligible bond of union. Such contemplations he sometimes, but not wisely, he says, thought sufficient of themselves, if rightly managed, for the conversion of any man. But he recommended this to some of his friends, and was disappointed of the desired effect.

Sure of his vocation, though unsettled in the articles of his faith, he declined a settlement which was offered him in the University, deeming the work of the ministry preferable to all other employments; and as at this time a heavy and most unexpected calamity befell his family, and threatened their whole house with poverty and dishonor, he hastened his own ordination, that he might be enabled to maintain himself, and assist his distressed relations. In the course of the studies preparatory for his examination, he read, at intervals, Hervey's *Theron and Aspasio*, — and by this book, he says, it pleased God to teach him the truths of the gospel. His faith and hope stood now on firmer ground. Soon after his first ordination, he met with Mr. Newton's *Cardiphonia*; for this book also had been translated into Dutch. "I read it," he says, "again and again, with a most unreserved assent, and with great pleasure and benefit. The Holy Spirit accompanied my repeated reading of it with an extraordinary measure of his quickening grace and illumination; insomuch that I hold myself indebted, under God, to that book for much spiritual knowledge and comfort, and for much encouragement to all goodness."

All that appears further in these letters is, that having entered upon the ministry, and finally settled at the Cape, (though the place is not mentioned, nor any other throughout the narrative, the writer wishing to remain unknown,) God gave him largely of the good things of this world; and he enjoyed a wonderful portion of divine assistance in the performance of both public and private duty. Nevertheless, he was pestered with most painful and unusual temptations of the Devil, so that sometimes the whole host of hell

combined seemed to assail him with all their fury. He believed that by this God principally purposed to preserve him from being exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation made to him.

While the six letters containing this narrative, which he sent over to Mr. Newton for publication, were in the press, another was received, stating that his health was on the decline ; that he was troubled with a violent cough, suffered much in the night from the weak state of his nerves, and was reduced to great bodily weakness ; and the mind partaking of the body's decay, he could sometimes neither think, nor speak, nor write. "Perhaps," he concludes, "I shall write to you no more. Perhaps this may be the last letter you will receive from me ; and perhaps before it reaches you, I shall have already left this world. Should you hear of my departure, do not mourn ; but rather rejoice and praise God on my behalf. I am well persuaded that Christ is my life, and therefore death will not be loss, but gain to me. — Oh happy and glorious hour, when I shall be delivered from all trouble and sin, from this body of death, from the wicked world, and from the snares of Satan ! when I shall appear before my Savior without spot ; and shall so behold his glory, and be filled with his presence, as to be wholly and forever engaged in adoration, admiration, gratitude, and love ! What should I fear ? Jesus died and lives for me. For what should I grieve ? Jesus is mine, and with him I have all things. Yet a little while, and every evil shall cease. I shall see him as he is, and be with him forever ! "

Mr. Newton published these letters as an illustration of the Power of Grace, taking these words of St. Paul for a motto, "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."⁷⁵ "My dear friend the translator," he said, "is so well known, that I scarcely need add, I could have applied to no one more capable of doing justice to the writer, or of giving satisfaction to the reader. I think the relation will not be thought too minute or circumstantial by competent judges ; I mean by those who are attentive to the workings of the human heart, and who acknowledge and admire the super-

⁷⁵ 1 Cor. iv. 20.

intendence of a Divine Providence over the concerns of mankind. The man was suddenly and totally changed. The servant of sin became the devoted servant of God. The fact is evident and incontrovertible. Let philosophers account for it, if they can, upon any other grounds than what the Scripture assigns. But let them be serious, and not think to answer or evade the inquiry, by the stale, unmeaning cry of enthusiasm. They cannot thus satisfy others; nor even themselves." — Mr. Newton was easily satisfied, — as easily as Van Lier himself, who, when wavering between Calvinism, Arminianism, and Socinianism, was fixed in the Torrid Zone by a perusal of — Theron and Aspasio! Motives of the same kind which had formerly made him call Cowper's attention to the case of Simon Browne, induced him to engage his poor friend in translating these letters, wherein they both saw the power of Grace, and perceived nothing else. Cowper had long been accustomed to confound bodily sensations with spiritual impressions; this narrative failed to revive in him the feelings with which he left St. Alban's; the good, therefore, which had been hoped for was not produced; but neither did the evil consequence follow of confirming him in that dangerous error — for it was already fixed in him too firmly to be shaken.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. NEWTON'S PREFACE AFFIXED TO THE POEMS. PUBLICATION OF COWPER'S HOMER. EDITION OF MILTON PROJECTED. COMMENCEMENT OF HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH HAYLEY. MRS. UNWIN'S PARALYTIC ATTACK.

THE Task had now carried with it through several editions its elder volume, which otherwise would have made a dead stand in the first; and now, as there could be no danger of impeding its success, Mr. Newton requested that he might have the honor of seeing his name connected with

the author's, by the insertion of the preface which had been suppressed.¹ Cowper replied, "The honor of your preface prefixed to my poems will be on my side; for surely to be known as the friend of a much-favored minister of God's word, is a more illustrious distinction in reality than to have the friendship of any poet in the world to boast of."² It has accordingly been inserted in all subsequent editions.

After the King's recovery, in 1789, Lady Hesketh had urged her cousin to write some verses on an event which had filled the nation with joy. Accordingly he "violated for once his engagements to Homer, and gave the morning to the King, the Queen, and her. On the word of a poet," said he, "I can assure you that I have done my best, sensible that when verses are presented to a royal personage, they ought not to be slovenly put together, nor such as one might produce between sleeping and waking. I have bestowed praise, which on these occasions is a thing of course, but have endeavored to dress it so as to give it some air of

¹ Yet it has been said, in a recent life of Cowper, that "Newton's selfishness, or jealousy, involved his friend in the only serious disappointment or uneasiness which, as an author, he experienced. His egotism in prefixing a preface of his own, ill written and injudicious, was one of the material causes of the bad success which attended Cowper's first publication." — With so little care is biography sometimes written! for the circumstances relating to this preface are stated in Cowper's printed correspondence. Ill-written the preface is not, for Mr. Newton never attempted to write a style, and therefore, being a man of strong natural abilities, he wrote with characteristic vigor. Neither was it injudicious, upon his own views. But it was worse; for while it spoke of Cowper's "long indisposition," and hinted at the character of that indisposition, it represented it as having occurred "some time after inclination had removed him from the hurry and bustle of life," — thus keeping the previous attack out of sight, and leading the reader to suppose that his retirement from society had in the first instance been altogether voluntary.

In a letter to Hannah More, (1787,) Mr. Newton says, "I wrote a preface to the first volume of Cowper's poems. His name was not then known among the booksellers, and they were afraid to bind up my preface with the book, lest it should operate like a death's head at a feast, and by its gravity hinder the sale it was designed to recommend. But I am not afraid to send you a copy." — *Mem. of Hannah More.*

The preface, though suppressed, had been bound up with certain copies. It is in the author's presentation copy to Mr. Bull, with the use of which I have been favored for the purpose of revising the text by that of the first edition.

² Oct. 15, 1790.

novelty ; and the best of the matter is, that though it be praise, it is truth, and I could swear to it. Had the King and Queen been such as the world has been pestered with ever since such folks were heard of, they should have had no verse from me, unless you had insisted ; but being such as they are, it seemed necessary that I, who am now poet by profession, should not leave an event in which their happiness and that of the nation are so much concerned, uncelebrated." ³

The subject which he had chosen was the Queen's visit to London on the night of the illumination ; and the verses were presented to the Princess Augusta, in expectation that they would be shown to her Majesty ; but Cowper heard nothing of their reception. "I gratified myself," said he, "by complimenting the sovereign whom I love and honor, and that gratification will be my reward. It would, indeed, be unreasonable to expect that persons who keep a laureate in constant pay, should have either praise or emolument to spare for every volunteer who may choose to make them his subject." ⁴

The laureateship became vacant by Warton's death in the year following. This office, which had never been worthily bestowed since it was taken from Dryden till Whitehead succeeded Cibber⁵ in it, had been rendered respectable by its two last possessors ; and Lady Hesketh wished to procure it for Cowper, who was always ready at occasional verses, and had written so willingly at her suggestion upon the King's restoration to health. But this was an affair in

³ March 5, 1789.

⁴ To Mrs. King, May 30.

⁵ One of Shenstone's correspondents says to him, "I am sincerely sorry my congratulations on your having a place under government were premature ; but I cannot say I wish you, as your friend Griffith terms it, *Po-laury*, though I knew it could not have the effect on you it so evidently has had on Whitehead. But what any one could think due to Cibber's merit, Mr. Shenstone ought to think beneath him." — *Hull's Select Letters*, vol. ii. p. 85.

Cibber might, indeed, properly have been called a *Po-laury* ; but though he disgraced the office,

αμυνσώταται σὺν ᾧδαις,

Euripides.

he was very superior to Shadwell.

which she knew it would be hazardous for her to move without his knowledge and consent. He replied to her —

MY DEAREST COZ,

The Lodge, May 28, 1790.

I thank thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion. But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them! It would be a leaden extinguisher, clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, would least wish me to wear it.

Adieu, ever thine — in Homer-hurry,

W. C.

Other of his friends entertained the same wish for him; and upon a groundless report that odes were no longer required, and that the salary was increased, he confessed to Mr. Bagot that he felt not the same dislike to the office: "but," said he, "I could neither go to court, nor could I kiss hands, were it for a much more valuable consideration." On this point, no doubt, Lady Hesketh had apprehended that his objection would rest; but if any solicitation had been used in his behalf, it is not likely that Warton would have been succeeded by Mr. Pye.

An amusing incident occurred to Cowper on this occasion. "You will wonder," said he to Lady Hesketh,⁶ "when I tell you, that I, even I, am considered by people who live at a great distance, as having interest and influence sufficient to procure a place at court for those who may happen to want one. I have, accordingly, been applied to within these few days by a Welshman, with a wife and many children, to get him made Poet-laureate as fast as possible. If thou wouldst wish to make the world merry twice a year, thou canst not do better than procure the office for him. I will promise thee, that he shall afford thee a hearty laugh in return every birth-day and every new year. He is an honest man."

This honest man was probably the Welsh attorney who

⁶ June 3, 1790.

had before asked him to take his poetical bark⁷ in tow. But if some whimsical applications were made to Cowper for his interest with gods, men, and booksellers; and if he was sometimes solicited to perform the hopeless part of chamber-counsel to suitors in the court of Parnassus, he was not without gratifying testimonies of his well-deserved celebrity. Men solicited his acquaintance who proved worthy of his friendship; — Hurdis,⁸ at this time, who, more than any other poet, might have called Cowper his master; and Park,⁸ whose services to English literature, gratefully as they must ever be acknowledged by all who follow him in those pleasant fields, will be considered by those who knew him as the least part of his praise. Abroad and at home the Task was read and admired. "Rose," said he,⁹ "learns from Dr. Maclaine, whom he saw lately, that my book is in the hands of sixty different persons at the Hague, who are all enchanted with it; not forgetting the said Dr. Maclaine himself, who tells him that he reads it every day, and is always the better for it! O rare we!" — "Have you seen," he asks Lady Hesketh,¹⁰ "the account of Five Hundred celebrated Authors now living? I am one of them. — To my honor be it spoken, the chronicler of us five hundred prodigies bestows on me, for aught I know, more commendations than on any other of my confraternity. May he live to write the histories of as many thousand poets, and find me the very best among them! Amen!" The most singular instance occurred in his own neighborhood. He had occasion to send a man to the George at Woburn; Mr. Martin, the master of the inn, "having learnt whose servant he was, told him that he had never seen Mr. Cowper, but he had heard him frequently spoken of by the companies that had called at his house, and therefore, when Sam would have paid for his breakfast, would take nothing from him. Who says that fame is only breath?

⁷ Vol. ii. p. 126.

⁸ More will be said of both these amiable men in the notes to the Correspondence than could properly be introduced in this place.

⁹ To Lady Hesketh, Aug. 9, 1788.

¹⁰ July 28, 1791.

On the contrary, it is good ale and cold beef into the bargain.”¹¹

Homer was now ready for the press. Upon receiving the list of subscribers from Johnson, Cowper saw how much he had been indebted to Hill's solicitation, and to Mrs. Hill's. Thanking them both for their friendly assistance, “It is,” said he,¹² “an illustrious catalogue, in respect of rank and title; but methinks I should have liked it as well had it been more numerous. The sum subscribed, however, will defray the expense of printing; which is as much as, in these unsubscribing days, I had any reason to promise myself. I devoutly second your droll wish, that the booksellers may contend about me. The more the better. Seven times seven, if they please; and let them fight with the fury of Achilles,

Till every rubric-post be crimsoned o'er
With blood of booksellers, in battle slain
For me, and not a periwig untorn.”

Rose had been with him when he finished¹³ translating the *Odyssey*, and the party at the lodge drank on that occasion “an unreluctant bumper to its success.” Exactly twelve months afterwards, when the revision and transcription were completed, Johnson of Norfolk, as he used to call his young kinsman, happened to be his guest.

One book of the translation, on its passage from the bookseller's to General Cowper, had gone to the bottom of the Thames. “A storm overtook it on its way to Kingston, and it sunk, together with the whole cargo of the boat in which it was a passenger.”¹⁴ The strangeness of the mishap almost compensated for so trifling a loss; but now, as they were talking by the fireside, and perhaps calling to mind this incident, Cowper expressed a wish that he could hear of “some trusty body” going to London, to whose care he might consign his voluminous labors, the work of five years; “For I purpose,” said he,¹⁵ “never to visit

¹¹ To Lady Hesketh, Feb. 13, 1791.

¹³ Sept. 17, 1790.

¹² Sept. 1789.

¹⁴ To Mr. Hill, Oct. 6, 1786.

¹⁵ To Mrs. Bodham, Sept. 9, 1790.

that city again myself, and should have been uneasy to have left a charge, of so much importance to me, altogether to the care of a stage-coachman. Johnny had no sooner heard my wish, than, offering himself to the service, he fulfilled it; and his offer was made in such terms, and accompanied with a countenance and manner expressive of so much alacrity, that unreasonable as I thought it at first to give him so much trouble, I soon found that I should mortify him by a refusal. He is gone, therefore, with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is, and there is no commodity, I think, a freebooter would covet less."

Cowper was well satisfied with the success of his subscription. All the Scotch Universities subscribed; for this he was obliged to the aid of Rose's friends in that country. His cousin Johnson procured at Cambridge a long list of colleges, and of the best names there; but some friend of Mr. Throckmorton's, who tried his influence at Oxford, received for answer that they subscribed to nothing. "It seems not a little extraordinary," said Cowper,¹⁶ "that persons so nobly patronized themselves on the score of literature, should resolve to give no encouragement to it in return. Should I find a fair opportunity to thank them hereafter, I will not neglect it.

Could Homer come himself, distressed and poor,
And tune his harp at Rhedycina's door,
The rich old vixen would exclaim, I fear,
'Begone! no tramper gets a farthing here.'

To Cambridge he felt himself "much obliged, and much disposed to admire the liberality of spirit which had been shown there. Certainly," said he,¹⁷ "I had not deserved much favor of their hands, all things considered. But the cause of literature seems to have some weight with them, and to have superseded the resentment they might be supposed to entertain on the score of certain censures that you wot of." — "Pope's subscriptions did not amount, I think,

¹⁶ To Mrs. Throckmorton, April 1, 1791.

¹⁷ To Mr. Johnson, April 6.

to six hundred ; and mine will not fall very short of five : Noble doings ! at a time of day when Homer has no news to tell us, and when all other comforts of life having arisen in price, poetry has of course fallen. I call it a comfort of life : it is so to others, but to myself it is become even a necessary.”¹⁸

Nothing now remained but to agree upon terms with the publisher. “I am glad,” said he to Lady Hesketh,¹⁹ “that Johnson waited on you, and glad that he acquitted himself so well in your presence ; glad too that he likes my prose, and filled with wonder that he likes my letters, because to him I have hardly sent any but letters of jobation. I verily believe that, though a bookseller, he has in him the soul of a gentleman. Such strange combinations sometimes happen, and such a one may have happened in his instance. We shall see.” In his next letter,²⁰ however, he says, “I am not much better pleased with that dealer in authors than yourself. His first proposal, which was to pay me with my own money, or, in other words, to get my copy for nothing, not only dissatisfied but hurt me ; implying, as I thought, the meanest opinion possible of my labor ; for that for which an intelligent man will give nothing, can be worth nothing. The consequence was, that my spirits sank considerably below par, and have but just begun to recover themselves. His second offer, which is to pay all expenses, and give me one thousand pounds next midsummer, leaving the copyright still in my hands, is more liberal. With this offer I have closed.”

The work was published in the summer of 1791, and Cowper received from his friends in all quarters good reports of its reception. Well pleased as he was with these fair promises of success, his feelings were more highly gratified by its becoming the means of renewing his intercourse with one who had formerly been among the most intimate of his friends. After repeating to his cousin the favorable accounts which had reached him, he said to her,²¹ “But now, if thou hast the faculty of erecting thine ears, lift them into

¹⁸ To Mr. Rose, April 29.

¹⁹ June 26, 1791.

²⁰ July 11.

²¹ Aug. 30.

the air, first taking off thy cap, that they may have their highest possible elevation. Mrs. Unwin says, 'No ; — do not tell her ladyship all ; tell her only enough to raise her curiosity, that she may come the sooner to Weston to have it gratified.' But I say, Yes ; — I will tell her all ; lest she should be overcharged, and burst by the way.

"The Chancellor and I, my dear, have had a correspondence on the subject of Homer. He had doubts, it seems, about the propriety of translating him in blank verse, and wrote to Henry to tell him so, adding a translation of his own in rhyme of the speech of Achilles to Phoenix, in the ninth book, and referring him to me, who, he said, could elevate it and polish it, and give it the tone of Homer. Henry sent this letter to me, and I answered it in one to his lordship ; but not meddling with his verses, for I remembered what happened between Gil Blas and the Archbishop of Toledo. His lordship sent me two sheets in reply, filled with arguments in favor of rhyme, which I was to answer, if I could ; and containing another translation of the same passage, only in blank verse, leaving it to me to give it rhyme, to make it close, and faithful, and poetical. All this I performed as best I could, and yesterday I heard from him again. In this last letter he says, 'I am clearly convinced that Homer may be best translated *without* rhyme, and that you have succeeded in the passages that I have looked into.'

"Such is the candor of a wise man, and a real scholar. I would to Heaven that all prejudiced persons were like him ! I answered this letter immediately ; and here, I suppose, our correspondence ends."

He was now idle for a while, both on account of his eyes, and because he knew not to what to attach himself. But neither his friends nor his bookseller were willing that he should long remain so. "Many different plans and projects," said he,²³ "are recommended to me. Some call aloud for original verse, others for more translation, and others for other things. Providence, I hope, will direct me in my choice ; for other guide I have none, nor wish for another." Little more than a month elapsed before he

²³ To Mr. Johnson, August 9, 1791.

informed his correspondents that he had been invited to a new literary engagement, and had not refused it. "A Milton," said he,²³ "that is to rival, and if possible to exceed in splendor, Boydell's Shakspeare, is in contemplation, and I am in the editor's office. Fuseli is the painter. My business will be to select notes from others, and to write original notes, to translate the Latin and Italian poems, and to give a correct text. I shall have years allowed me to do it in."

He had perused Dr. Johnson's *Life of Milton* with that displeasure which all readers feel in proportion as they admire Milton, either in his poetical or his political character. Cowper admired him in both: on the first, no man was more competent to form an opinion, and scarcely any one could be more incompetent on the second; for no one who reads history at all, had read less: Mrs. Macauley was good authority with him. In some degree, too, he had been prepared to entertain his bookseller's proposal, by having recently perused Milton's Latin poems with more attention than he had ever given to them before: "but these," said he, writing to Mr. Bagot,²⁴ "I must make the subject of some future letters, in which it will be ten to one that your friend, Samuel Johnson, gets another slap or two at the hands of your humble servant. Pray read them yourself, and with as much attention as I did; then read the doctor's remarks, if you have them, and then tell me what you think of both. It will be pretty sport for you on such a day as this, which is the fourth that we have had of almost incessant rain." And he entered the more readily into the project, because, when the two volumes of his poems turned out to be of considerable value, the publisher, to whom he had given them, would have allowed him to resume the gift. It was a gift which, in Cowper's circumstances, ought not to have been made; and indeed it appears strange that the business should have been managed for him so incautiously by both his friends; for though Mr. Unwin was not conversant in such transactions, Mr. Newton was. Sensible as he now was of their improvidence,

²³ To Mr. Rose, September 14.

²⁴ May 2, 1791.

he chose still to be bound by it; but the offer, and the further pleasure which he felt from "subsequent proofs of liberality in Johnson's conduct,"²⁵ disposed him to concur in his project concerning Milton, though he had at first from diffidence declined it. Accordingly he wrote to him,²⁶ saying, "I have at length brought myself to something like a hope that I may, perhaps, prove equal to this business, and in consequence have resolved to attempt it, but must depend on you for my implements. Newton's edition I have, but have nothing more."

Mrs. Unwin, who knew from sorrowful experience how necessary some such occupation was to keep his mind from relapsing into its old and rooted disease, was especially pleased when this engagement was concluded. Communicating it to one of his Norfolk cousins, Mrs. Ball, she says,²⁷ "Ever since the close of his translation, I have had many anxious thoughts how he would spend the advancing winter. Had he followed either of the three professions in his earlier days, he might have been not only laying the foundation, but also raising the fabric of a distinguished character, and have spent the remaining portion of his life in endeavoring to maintain it. But the life of a mere gentleman very few, or any, are equal to support with credit to themselves, or comfort to their friends. But a gracious Providence has dissipated my fears on that head. After a warm and strong solicitation, he has been prevailed upon to stand forth as an editor of the most splendid and magnificent edition of Milton that ever was offered to the public. His engagement is to translate all the Latin and Italian poems, to select the most approved notes of his predecessors in that line, and to add elucidations and annotations on the text as he sees proper. Fuseli is to furnish paintings for the thirty copperplates, and Johnson, the bookseller, has taken upon himself to provide the first artists for engraving. This work will take your cousin, upon his own computation, about two years."

Some of Cowper's friends, however, regretted that he should have pledged himself for two years "to comment

²⁵ Hayley, vol. iii. p. 3.

²⁶ Sept. 6, 1791.

²⁷ Oct. 25, 1791.

and translate ; ” and it seems as if he himself, after a while, looked on with little satisfaction to the editorial part of his undertaking. He says to Mr. Bagot, “ As to Milton, the die is cast. I am engaged, have bargained with Johnson, and cannot recede. I should otherwise have been glad to do as you advise, to make the translation of his Latin and Italian poems, part of another volume, for with such an addition I have nearly as much verse in my budget as would be required for the purpose.”²⁸ And in answer to Hurdis, he writes, “ I am much obliged to you for wishing that I were employed in some original work rather than in translation. To tell the truth, I am of your mind ; and unless I could find another Homer, I shall promise, I believe and vow, when I have done with Milton, never to translate again. But my veneration for our great countryman is equal to what I feel for the Grecian, and consequently I am happy, and feel myself honorably employed, whatever I do for Milton.”²⁹

It was not for want of original subjects that he had engaged in this undertaking. Lady Hesketh, taking up apparently a thought which Paoli, as reported by Boswell,³⁰ had thrown out in conversation, proposed to him the Mediterranean for a topic. He replied, “ Unless I were a better historian than I am, there would be no proportion between the theme and my ability. It seems, indeed, not to be so properly a subject for one poem, as for a dozen.”³¹ Mr. Buchanan, the curate of Ravenstone, (“ a little sequestered village within the distance of an easy walk from Weston,”) observed to him, that no poet, ancient or modern, had expressly treated on the four divisions of human life — in-

²⁸ Dec. 5, 1791.

²⁹ Dec. 10.

³⁰ Dining at General Paoli's, Johnson said, “ The grand object of travelling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean. On those shores were the four great empires of the world, the Assyrian, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman. All our religion, almost all our law, almost all our arts, almost all that sets us above savages, has come to us from the shores of the Mediterranean.” The General observed, that THE MEDITERRANEAN would be a noble subject for a poem. — *Boswell*, vol. vi. p. 154. Ed. 1835.

A noble subject indeed, — but about as practicable for a poem as for a panorama.

³¹ July 11, 1791.

fancy, youth, manhood, and old age ; and he offered for his consideration a brief sketch, with the hope that he might be induced to work upon it. It pleased Cowper so well, that he requested him to draw out his thoughts more at length ; and in reply to the second sketch expressed a full determination to undertake the subject. "My dear sir," said he, "you have sent me a beautiful poem, wanting nothing but *metre*. I would to Heaven that you would give it that requisite yourself ; for he who could make the sketch, cannot but be well qualified to finish. But if you will not, I will ; provided always, nevertheless, that God gives me ability, for it will require no common share to do justice to your conceptions."³²

Accordingly he began upon this theme, and long cherished the thoughts of pursuing it, expecting, as it appears, to produce a poem of about the same length as the Task. But another subject had taken stronger possession of his mind — an Oak in Yardley Chase, which was within reach of his walks, and was believed to be as old as the Norman conquest. He never bestowed more labor on any of his compositions than upon the commencement of a poem upon this tree ; nor did he ever labor more successfully. No hint of his intention was ever given to any of his friends ; this was that he might have the pleasure of surprising them with it ; and it may be supposed that he looked to its completion with more confidence, because it would probably not have extended beyond a few hundred lines. But his engagement with Milton engrossed him altogether ; and when he looked into the task of commenting, his spirits began to fail. "I seem," he said, "to fear more the labor to which it calls me, than any great difficulty with which it is likely to be attended. To the labors of versifying I have no objection, but to the labors of criticism I am new, and apprehend that I shall find them wearisome. Should that be the case, I shall be dull, and must be contented to share the censure of being so, with almost all the commentators that have ever existed."³³ The more he considered this engagement, the more irksome it appeared to him. "How

³² May 11, 1791.

³³ To Mr. Hurdis, Feb. 21, 1792.

often," said he, "do I wish, in the course of the day, that I could be employed once more in poetry ; and how often, of course, that this Miltonic trap had never caught me!" — "That ill-fated work, impracticable in itself, has made every thing else impracticable." ³⁴

But a melancholy change had taken place in Cowper's domestic circumstances, and in his state of mind, before he thus repented altogether of his engagement. When it was made, Mrs. Unwin, though she had not recovered from the effects of her fall, was still able to take thought for him, and contribute to his comfort, and bear a cheerful part in society. In the same letter wherein she communicates his arrangement concerning the Milton to her Norfolk friends, she said, "Another capital pleasure we are now rejoicing in. Dear Lady Hesketh arrived at Weston this very day sevendnight, accompanied with her ever-attendant train, fine sense, good temper, affectionate cordiality, and ever-pleasing vivacity." — It was the last visit in which she either found or communicated cheerfulness at Weston Lodge. About two months after her arrival, Mrs. Unwin was seized with a giddiness, and must have fallen with her chair, if Cowper, on whom she called for help, had not been just in time to save her. The giddiness, though with some abatement, lasted the whole day, and was attended with other very alarming symptoms, so that she kept her bed for many days, and her chamber for some weeks. In writing to inform Rose of this, whose intended visit at Christmas was thereby prevented, Cowper says, "She has been my faithful and affectionate nurse for many years, and consequently has a claim on all my attentions. She has them, and will have them as long as she wants them, which will probably be, at the least, a considerable time to come. I feel the shock, as you may suppose, in every nerve. God grant that there may be no repetition of it ! Another such a shock upon her would, I think, upset me completely ; but at present I hold up bravely." ³⁵

Her gradual amendment seemed to give him reason for hoping, that, as the spring advanced, she might be perfectly

³⁴ To Hayley, Dec. 26, 1792.

³⁵ Dec. 21, 1791.

restored to health ; though he was aware that they had both "reached a time of life when heavy blows, if not fatal, are at least long felt." Spring came, but it took from him more than it brought. At the beginning of March, he writes to Mr. Newton — "All our little world is going to London — the gulf that swallows most of our good things, and, like a bad stomach, too often assimilates them to itself. Our neighbors at the Hall go thither to-morrow. Mr. and Mrs. Throckmorton, as we lately called them, but now Sir John and my Lady, are no longer inhabitants here, but henceforth of Bucklands, in Berkshire. I feel the loss of them, and shall feel it, since kinder or more friendly treatment I never can receive, at any hands, than I have always found at theirs. But it has long been a foreseen change, and was, indeed, almost daily expected long before it happened. The desertion of the Hall, however, will not be total. The second brother, George, now Mr. Courtenay,³⁶ intends to reside there ; and with him, as with his elder brother, I have always been on terms the most agreeable.

"Such is this variable scene ; so variable, that, had the reflections I sometimes make upon it a permanent influence, I should tremble at the thought of a new connection ; and, to be out of the reach of its mutability, lead almost the life of a hermit. It is well with those who, like you, have God for their companion ! Death cannot deprive them of Him, and He changes not the place of his abode. Other changes, therefore, to them are all supportable ; and what you say of your own experience is the strongest possible proof of it. Had you lived without God, you could not have endured the loss you mention. May He preserve me from a similar one ; at least, till he shall be pleased to draw me to himself again ! Then, if ever that day come, it will make me equal to my burden ; but at present I can bear nothing well."

Lady Hesketh went about a week after the Throckmortons ; and when Rose, who came to cheer them for a few days after her departure, had returned to London, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were "once more reduced to their

³⁶ And since, Sir George Throckmorton.

dual state." It was no longer good for them to be in that state, though he would fain have thought so. "There are those in the world," said he,³⁷ "whom we love, and whom we are happy to see; but we are happy likewise in each other, and so far independent of our fellow-mortals, as to be able to pass our time comfortably without them! — as comfortably, at least, as Mrs. Unwin's frequent indispositions, and my no less frequent troubles of mind, will permit. When I am much distressed, any company but hers distresses me more, and makes me doubly sensible of my sufferings; though sometimes, I confess, it falls out otherwise; and by the help of more general conversation, I recover that elasticity of mind which is able to resist the pressure. On the whole, I believe I am situated exactly as I should wish to be, were my situation to be determined by my own election; and am denied no comfort that is compatible with the total absence of the chief of all."

At this time, when they most needed it, a circumstance arising out of the engagement concerning Milton gave a salutary excitement to Cowper's spirits. While Fuseli was employed upon his Milton gallery, and Cowper proceeding with his version of the Latin and Italian poems, Boydell also had projected a magnificent edition of the same poet, and had engaged Westall to make designs for it, and Hayley to write a life of the author. "This squabble between Fuseli and Boydell," said Cowper,³⁸ "does not interest me at all. Let it terminate as it may, I have only to perform my job, and leave the event to be decided by the combatants.

*Suave mari magno turbantibus æquora ventis,
E terrâ magnum alterius spectare laborem."*

Lucretius.

A paragraph, however, in the newspapers represented that the rivalry between the publishers was participated by the writers, and that Hayley and Cowper were both emulously engaged in writing lives of Milton. Now Cowper himself was not more exempt from any emulous feeling than Hayley,

³⁷ To Mr. Newton, March 18, 1792.

³⁸ To Mr. Bagot, Dec. 5, 1791.

who, in all his feelings, was one of the most generous of men; and the paragraph had the singular effect of leading to a friendship between them. For Hayley addressed a sonnet to his reputed competitor upon this occasion.

Cowper! delight of all who justly prize
 The splendid magic of a strain divine,
 That sweetly tempts th' enlightened soul to rise,
 As sun-beams lure an eagle to the skies!
 Poet! to whom I feel my heart incline
 As to a friend endeared by virtue's ties;
 Ne'er shall my name in pride's contentious line
 With hostile emulation cope with thine.
 No! let us meet with kind, fraternal aim,
 Where Milton's shrine invites a votive throng.
 With thee I share a passion for his fame,
 His zeal for truth, his scorn of venal blame:
 But thou hast rarer gifts; to thee belong
 His harp of highest tone, his sanctity of song.

This sonnet he enclosed to Cowper, with the following letter:—

DEAR SIR,

Eartham, near Chichester, Feb. 7, 1792.

I have often been tempted, by affectionate admiration of your poetry, to trouble you with a letter; but I have repeatedly checked myself, in recollecting that the vanity of believing ourselves distantly related in spirit to a man of genius, is but a sorry apology for intruding on his time.

Though I resisted my desire of professing myself your friend, that I might not disturb you with intrusive familiarity, I cannot resist a desire, equally affectionate, of disclaiming an idea, which I am told is imputed to me, of considering myself, on a recent occasion, as an antagonist to you. Allow me, therefore, to say, I was solicited to write a *Life of Milton*, for Boydell and Nicol, before I had the least idea that you and Mr. Fuseli were concerned in a project similar to theirs. When I first heard of your intention, I was apprehensive that we might undesignedly thwart each other; but on seeing your proposals, I am agreeably persuaded that our respective labors will be far from clashing; as it is your design to illustrate Milton with a series of notes, and I only mean to execute a more candid life of him than

his late biographer has given us, upon a plan that will, I flatter myself, be particularly pleasing to those who love the author as we do.

As to the pecuniary interest of those persons who venture large sums in expensive decorations of Milton, I am persuaded his expanding glory will support them all. Every splendid edition, where the merits of the pencil are in any degree worthy of the poet, will, I think, be secure of success. I wish it cordially to all ; as I have great affection for the arts, and a sincere regard for those whose talents reflect honor upon them.

To you, my dear sir, I have a grateful attachment, for the infinite delight which your writings have afforded me ; and if, in the course of your work, I have any opportunity to serve or oblige you, I shall seize it with that friendly spirit which has impelled me at present to assure you, both in prose and rhyme, that I am

Your very cordial admirer,

W. HAYLEY.

P. S. — I wrote the enclosed sonnet on being told that our names had been idly printed together, in a newspaper, *as hostile competitors*. Pray forgive its poetical defects, for its affectionate sincerity.

From my ignorance of your address, I send this to your booksellers, by a person commissioned to place my name in the list of your subscribers ; and let me add, if you ever wish to form a new collection of names for any similar purpose, I entreat you to honor me so far as to rank *mine*, of your own accord, among those of your sincerest friends. Adieu !

Having written the letter, and transcribed the sonnet, Hayley hesitated whether or not to intrude on one whose habits were even more retired than his own, by sending them. His friend, Dr. Warner, overruled this doubt ; Cowper, he said, would surely be pleased ; and, as he was going to London, he offered to deposit the packet with his publisher, Johnson. There it remained six weeks, to Hayley's no little mortification, and to the vexation of Cowper,

when he received it at last. "What, indeed," says he,³⁹ "could he imagine less than that I meant, by such an obstinate silence, to tell him that I valued neither him, nor his praises, nor his proffered friendship? in short, that I considered him a rival, and therefore, like a true author, hated and despised him." Of course, the letter was answered on the very evening that it came to hand. The only part of that answer which has appeared is the following passage, which Hayley said he had an honest pride in transcribing.⁴⁰ "I rejoice that you are employed to do justice to the character of a man, perhaps the chief of all, who have done honor to our country, and whose very name I reverence. Here we shall not clash, or interfere with each other, for a Life of Milton is no part of my bargain. In short, we will cope with each other in nothing, but that affection which you avow for me, unworthy of it as I am, and which your character and writings, and especially your kind letter, have begotten in my heart for you. Every remark of yours on Milton will be highly valued by me." Hayley was equally prompt in his reply. "He is now," said Cowper, "convinced that I love him, as indeed I do; and I account him the chief acquisition that my own verse has ever procured me."

Their correspondence now became frequent, and was carried on with characteristic warmth on both sides. Hayley was invited to Weston, and pressed to visit his unseen friend there, in May. "I will endeavor," said Cowper to Lady Hesketh,⁴¹ "to greet him with a countenance that shall not stiffen him into freestone, but cannot be answerable for my success. It will depend, in some measure, on the countenance that he presents himself; for whether I will or not, I am always a physiognomist, and, if I dislike a man's looks, am sure to assume such as he will find equally disagreeable. But I hope better things from my friend Hayley. It seldom happens that a person so amiable in his disposition, is very Gorgonian in his aspect."

Two persons so well inclined to like each other, and already intellectually acquainted, were not likely to be dis-

³⁹ To Lady Hesketh, March 25, 1791.

⁴⁰ Appendix to Cowper's *Homer*, p. 384.

⁴¹ April 26.

appointed at their meeting. Hayley was then in his forty-seventh year; time had given to his fine and animated countenance ⁴² a thoughtful and somewhat pensive air; but his disposition was buoyant and lively, and his manners as pleasing as they were warm, and not less cordial than pleasing. "Every body here," said Cowper, "has fallen in love with him, and wherever he goes every body must. — We have formed a friendship that I trust will last for life, and render us an edifying example for all future poets!" Hayley expressed his feelings to his old friend, Romney. "*Carissimo Pittore*," said he, "often have I wished to convey you by magic to my side, when you were not near me; but I believe I never wished it more ardently than I have done under this very kind, poetical roof. You would be pleased here, as I am, and think with me, that my brother bard is one of the most interesting creatures in the world, from the powerful united influence of rare genius and singular misfortunes, with the additional charm of mild and engaging manners. Then, as to the grand article of females, (for what is a scene without a woman in it?) here is a muse of seventy, that I perfectly idolize. — Here is a wonderful scene; it would affect you, I know, as it does me. Few things in life have given me such heartfelt satisfaction as my visit to this house; and the more so as my kind hosts seem to regard me as sent to them by Providence, for our general delight and advantage. — As to myself, I feel I have now found the thing I most wanted — a congenial, poetical spirit, willing to join with me in the most social and friendly cultivation of an art dear to us both, and particularly dear to us as the cement of friendship."

"My host," says Hayley, "though now in his sixty-first year, appeared as happily exempt from all the infirmities of advanced life, as friendship could wish him to be; and his more elderly companion, not materially oppressed by age, discovered a benevolent alertness of character, that seemed to promise a continuance of their domestic comfort. Their

⁴² Miss Seward says, in a letter to George Hardinge, "I am glad you like Hayley's countenance. How have I seen those fine eyes of his sparkle, and melt, and glow, as wit, compassion, or imagination, had the ascendance in his mind." — *Letters*, vol. i. p. 351.

reception of me was kindness itself. — I was enchanted to find that the manners and conversation of Cowper resembled his poetry, charming by unaffected elegance and the graces of a benevolent spirit. I looked with affectionate veneration and pleasure on the lady who, having devoted her life and fortune to the service of this tender and sublime genius, in watching over him with maternal vigilance through many years of the darkest calamity, appeared to be now enjoying a reward justly due to the noblest exertions of friendship, in contemplating the health and the renown of the poet, whom she had the happiness to preserve.

“It seemed hardly possible to survey human nature in a more touching and a more satisfactory point of view. — Their tender attention to each other, their simple, devout gratitude for the mercies which they had experienced together, and their constant, but unaffected propensity to impress on the mind and heart of a new friend the deep sense which they incessantly felt of their mutual obligations to each other, afforded me very singular gratification.”

Hayley had not been with them many days, when, on returning from a morning walk with his new friend, they were informed that Mrs. Unwin had had a paralytic stroke. Cowper ran to her, and came back in a state that alarmed Hayley in the highest degree for his senses. His first speech was wild in the extreme. “My answer,” says Hayley, “was little less so ; but it was addressed to the predominant fancy of my unhappy friend, and, with the blessing of Heaven, it produced an instantaneous calm in his troubled mind. From that moment he rested on my friendship with such mild and cheerful confidence, that his affectionate spirit regarded me as sent providentially to support him in a season of the severest affliction.”

Their Olney apothecary would not allow that the attack in December had been paralytic. Cowper himself never doubted but that it was ; that the present was so could not be dissembled : her speech was almost unintelligible ; she was unable to move from place to place, or to keep her eyes open ; and the use of the right hand and arm was lost. Hayley eagerly inquired if there was an electrical machine in the neighborhood ; and little as it could have been

expected, an inhabitant of the village possessed just such a one as was wanted, which he had in part constructed himself. Hayley, from endeavoring at first to counteract by electricity a continual tendency to inflammation in his own eyes, had been used to try its remedial effects upon his country neighbors, often to no avail, but now and then with the happiest results. He tried it now upon Mrs. Unwin, and wrote also to his friend, Dr. Austin, for advice : before that advice could arrive, "this powerful though uncertain remedy" appeared to be of material service. She daily recovered a little strength and a little power of utterance; "but her amendment," said Cowper to Lady Hesketh, "is slow, as must be expected at her time of life, and in such a disorder : I am as well myself as you have ever known me in a time of much trouble, and even better. Hayley has been all in all to us on this very afflicting occasion. Love him, I charge you, dearly, for my sake. Where could I have found a man, except himself, who could have made himself so necessary to me in so short a time, that I absolutely know not how to live without him?" Lady Hesketh, on the first intelligence of this affliction, offered to come to them. He replied, "Though happy, as you well know, to see you at all times, we have no need, and I trust shall have none, to trouble you with a journey made on purpose. Yet once again, I am willing and desirous to believe we shall be a happy trio at Weston ; but unless necessity dictates a journey of charity, I wish all yours hither to be made for pleasure."⁴³

Hayley left them in the beginning of June. There was then every appearance of progressive amendment in Mrs. Unwin, and the disposition of the patient herself afforded the best ground of hope. "It is a great blessing to us both," said Cowper, "that, poor, feeble thing as she is, she has a most invincible courage, and a trust in God's goodness that nothing can shake. She always tells me she is better, — and will probably die with those very words upon her lips. They will be true then at least, for then she will be best of all." Their warm friend had urged them to visit him at Eartham, as soon as Mrs. Unwin should be able to

⁴³ May 26, 1792.

take the journey ; and as each hoped that such a change might be beneficial to the other, both were willing to think it possible that they might undertake what was to them so formidable a journey. A year before ⁴⁴ he had said, in reply to Hurdis's introductory letter, " We shall not, I hope, hereafter be known to each other as poets only, for your writings have made me ambitious of a nearer approach to you. Your door, however, will never be opened to me. My fate and fortune have combined with my natural disposition to draw a circle round me which I cannot pass ; nor have I been more than thirteen miles from home these twenty years, and so far very seldom. But you are a younger man, and therefore may not be quite so immovable ; in which case, should you choose at any time to move West-ton-ward, you will always find me happy to receive you." — Now, however, the ardor of a new friendship, and the hope that Mrs. Unwin's recovery might be promoted by travelling and by change of air, roused him to a resolution of which he had fancied himself incapable ; and he who, during so many years, had been as it were spell-bound within the purlieu of Olney, prepared for a journey to the south coast.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAYLEY. COWPER'S VISIT TO EARTHAM. ROMNEY.

WHEN Hayley left his own Memoirs for posthumous publication, he designated himself in the title as the Friend and Biographer of Cowper, having, no doubt, in mind Lord Brooke's epitaph at Warwick ; but honorable as in both instances such friendship must ever be deemed, both Hayley and Lord Brooke will be remembered also for merits of their own.

William Hayley, whose friendship for Cowper was in its consequences rewarded well, and well deserved the recom-

⁴⁴ March 6, 1791.

pense which is obtained, was born at Chichester, in 1745. His father raised a company during that time of rebellion and threatened invasion ; a baronetcy was offered him in acknowledgment of his patriotic exertions ; this he had prudence enough to decline, as a rank which it was beyond his means to support ; but the military character which he had assumed led him into expenses that impaired his fortune, and into habits of intemperance that brought him to an early grave. The eldest of his two children was laid beside him two years afterwards in Eartham churchyard, having died of inoculated small-pox. A more deplorable fate soon threatened the surviving child ; but by the devoted care and prayers of his mother he was restored from a disease which the physicians pronounced would leave him, if he escaped with life, a deformed and helpless idiot. It left, however, no other inconvenience than a slight lameness. When he was sufficiently recovered, he was placed at Eton. His mind, he says, always " recoiled with emotions of indignation and disgust from the recollection of the first years that he passed there ;" but his time was not ill spent ; and his early predilection for poetry was encouraged by Roberts, then one of the ushers, and afterwards provost, himself a poet¹ of the same respectable class as the author of *Leonidas* and the *Athenaid*.

After remaining six years at Eton, he gave up his chance of a fellowship at King's College, because he preferred the easier discipline of Trinity Hall. There he entered in 1763, the year in which Cowper retired from the world ; and there he amused himself with pursuing his classical studies, and took lessons in drawing and Italian. Three years were thus not unprofitably spent ; he then left Cambridge without taking a degree, and entered his name at the Middle Temple, without any serious intention of studying the law. For he

¹ Dr. Roberts's *Judah Restored* was one of the first books that I ever possessed. It was given me by a lady whom I must ever gratefully and affectionately remember as the kindest friend of my boyhood. I read it often then, and can still recur to it with satisfaction ; and perhaps I owe something to the plain dignity of its style ; which is suited to the subject, and every where bears the stamp of good sense and careful erudition. To acknowledge obligations of this kind is both a pleasure and a duty.

soon convinced himself that nature had never intended him for a barrister; and flattered himself with an expectation that his passion for poetry, and particularly for the drama, might be made the means of enriching him in a far more agreeable way. He remembered, he says, that Dryden had once engaged to produce four new plays every year, and therefore thought himself modest in his purpose of composing only two in the same space of time, and moderate in his calculation of deriving only a thousand a year from his dramatic profits.

Such baseless expectations might have ruined any one who had not, like Hayley, a fair inheritance on which to rest; but, provided as he was with that substantial gift of fortune, he could smile at the recollection of his utter disappointment, and never had cause to regret that he had not applied himself to some professional pursuit. His excellent mother had no other wish than to promote his happiness in any way which he thought best. She had taken a house in London, because he liked a London residence: when he married, in 1769, she enabled him to make a settlement upon his wife, by giving up her own: she continued to reside with them in town as long as they preferred London for their place of abode; and she removed with them into the country in 1774, at the close of which year she died, fortunate in not living to witness the commencement of that domestic infelicity, the possibility of which she had had but too much reason to apprehend. This consideration must have consoled her son in his regret that the high reputation which he afterwards obtained came too late to gladden that heart which of all others would have most rejoiced in it. For she had kindled and fostered in him the love of poetry, and encouraged his literary ambition as he grew up; and though not without fear, had not opposed his purpose when, disregarding the ordinary pursuits of fortune, he resolved to make literature at once his business and his recreation. He has said of himself that "his contempt of money often rose to romantic excess, and sometimes led him into serious inconvenience; but in his estimation, books, retirement, and friendship, were the real treasures of human life. In all these he was abundantly rich; and he justly reckoned his

quick and constant relish for them all a blessing in itself that called for incessant and cheerful gratitude to the Giver of all good."²

As a dramatic writer, Hayley was unsuccessful, though it had been his first ambition to excel in that line, and though several of his pieces were brought upon the stage. One luckless tragedy, which he had published without the hope of its being acted, had the singular fortune of being represented at both the London theatres at the same time, condemned at the one, and received with applause at the other. The manager of Covent Garden said to him in a letter at this time, "I shall regard it as one of the most fortunate events of my mimic life, if I can fairly bring you to a determination of being a dramatic author; I mean *for the stage*, which certainly holds out much greater rewards of fame, delight, and profit, than any other species of literary composition."³ No wonder that he continued to mistake his own powers, when he was thus encouraged in the highest quarter, and when rival managers contended for a play which carried with it, in its detestable subject, its own certain condemnation. But all Hayley's tragedies were deficient in the essentials of dramatic poetry; and his comedies were written upon the French model, in rhyme. These he intended for a private theatre. Colman,⁴ however, brought

² Memoirs, vol. i. p. 333.

³ Memoirs, vol. i. p. 396.

⁴ "A comedy in rhyme," said he, "is a bold attempt; yet when so well executed as in the present instance, it would, I think, be received with favor, especially on a stage of a genius somewhat similar to that of a private theatre, for which they were professedly written."* Henderson, after reading it aloud in his admirable manner, was of a different opinion: "he admired it exceedingly, but thought the rhyme unfit for a public stage, as it is so difficult to recite without an unpleasant monotony." Gibbon called it "the boldest of poetical attempts, but declared himself astonished and delighted by the happiness of its execution."

The Monthly Review (vol. lxx. April, 1784) says, "The comedies are in rhyme, — start not, reader, — *in rhyme*; but such rhyme, so familiar, so easy, so flowing, that prose itself can scarcely appear more natural, more convenient for the purposes of the dialogue, or the business of the drama; like the ancient iambic, recommended by Aristotle, and characterized by Horace as the measure peculiarly suited to the scene, *natum rebus agendis*. — *Measure* in comedy is to this day agreeable to

* Memoirs, vol. i. p. 314, 293, 295.

out one of them at the Haymarket, and it met with some success.

But though Hayley mistook his own powers when he attempted dramatic composition, he made the best use of them in composing his *Essays on Painting, on History, and on Epic Poetry*, in the form of Epistles in verse, addressed respectively to Romney, Gibbon, and Mason. With the painter he was already intimate, and the hope of contributing to make his friend's genius better known to the public, was the chief motive which had induced him to choose that branch of the arts for his subject. The *Essay on History* procured for him Gibbon's friendship; the other *Essay* drew from Mason a letter of handsome acknowledgment; but when the two poets met, though it was with the mutual desire of being pleased, Hayley⁵ felt nothing but what was repulsive in the cold manner and saturnine aspect of one whom he had hoped to find as ardent and as open-hearted as himself.

The principal design in these Epistles was to present "a general view of the art in question, with a just and anima-

the public ear in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, Jonson, and Shakspeare. *Rhyme*, too, in the plays of Hayley, may not only be endured, but applauded. — Yet we should certainly have revolted most strongly against the idea, had not the author illustrated his precept by his own example. — Let Hayley then, and those few who have the talents of Hayley, *by special license* write comedies in rhyme; but let them not tell us that such a comedy may be still more entertaining than a comedy of equal merit in other points, which confines itself to prose." "Time, the most infallible test of literary opinions, (we use Mr. Hayley's own words,) has proved the contrary."

⁵ "His cheerful spirit was surprised and concerned to find a man of Mason's acknowledged mental powers so shaken in his manly frame by age and disappointments; and so soured in his temper, that, according to his own declaration to his friendly eulogist, he received little or no pleasure from public praise, and much vexation from the coarse censure and malignant sneers in which the reptiles of literature are apt, in all times, to indulge themselves against those successful authors, whose preëminence they cannot patiently endure. Of such abuse, indeed, Mason had a full share, and probably the more for having been supposed the author of much anonymous but celebrated sarcastic poetry. In conversing upon life and literature, he showed many signs of his having suffered his own enjoyments to be sadly overclouded by ebullitions of a spleenful spirit. The conference excited in Hayley more pity than admiration; but the two poets parted with many expressions of reciprocal regard." — *Hayley's Memoirs*, vol. i. pp. 276, 318.

ting character of its most eminent professors. There is, I believe," says he, "a season of life in which poems of this nature may be read with the happiest effect. The first, and perhaps the most important step towards forming a great artist in any line, is to inspire a youth of quick feelings with an enthusiastic passion for some particular art, and with an ingenuous delight in the glory of its heroes. — Such was the end that I proposed to myself in these Essays ; for as delicate or inconstant health, and the love of literary retirement, have prevented me from serving the community in scenes of active life, I have considered it as particularly incumbent on me to endeavor, at least, in my poetical pursuits, to promote the interest of society. — I am aware that such an idea is open to much raillery, as vain and romantic ; but poetry is an art which conduces so little to the private emolument and advantage of those who devote even a life to it, that they ought, I think, to be indulged in such prospects, however chimerical, as arise only from a benevolent vanity." 6

Whether or not any of Hayley's Essays have had the specific effect which he hoped to produce, they imparted, by help of the copious notes wherewith he elucidated them, much information in an agreeable form : his translated specimens of Dante, which were introduced in these notes, revived among us a taste for the Italian poets ; and Spanish literature had been so long and so utterly neglected in this country, that he may be truly said to have introduced the knowledge of it to his contemporaries. When Lord Holland published his *Life of Lope de Vega*, he sent a copy of it to Hayley, with a letter, saying that he had been induced to learn Spanish by what he had read of *Ercilla* in those notes.

Perhaps the Essays were read more for the sake of the notes than of the poetry ; but the poetry was praised in the highest terms. The author was spoken of as a new star in the poetical hemisphere, whose first appearance had been noted with delight, and who continued to shine, if possible, with increasing splendor. "Almost unrivalled excellence"

was discovered in his choice and application of similes, which it was said had ever been considered one great test of the poet's art ; and his sentiments were pronounced to be "such as could only be expected from an imagination truly creative, regulated by a judgment critically exact." Critics talked of "his inimitable pen," and the "admirable truth and precision of pencil, which so eminently marked the animated portraits of this masterly writer." It was said of him that he had "the fire and the invention of Dryden, the wit and ease of Prior, and that if his versification was a degree less polished than Pope's, it was more various ;" "that he had studiously avoided the meretricious ornaments of fantastic and far-fetched epithets ; and that his ideas, though conceived in the finest frenzy of imagination, were on every occasion expressed with perspicuity, elegance, and the chastest simplicity."

"It may be remarked," said a reviewer, "of this writer, that he is almost the only poet, of the present day at least, who has had the courage, (for such is the libertinism of the world that it must be called so,) to avow, in his poetical capacity, a belief in revelation. His example is a sufficient proof, (notwithstanding a respectable opinion to the contrary,) that the great truths of religion, though incapable of embellishment, will admit of poetical application, and may be introduced both with force and propriety." This was injurious to Hayley's contemporaries : it required no courage in those days, nor has it, God be thanked ! in any age, for an author in this country, whether in prose or verse, to declare his belief in revealed religion. I know not, indeed, whether any poet of that generation, except Churchill, ventured to intimate — for even Churchill did not venture to proclaim — his unbelief. The praise, however, which was thus bestowed on Hayley, would have been his due, if it had not been unjustly and invidiously enhanced ; and Cowper was no doubt on that score the more readily disposed to reciprocate his proffered friendship.

There is one passage in Hayley's poems with which Cowper would sympathize deeply in all its parts.

For me who feel, whene'er I touch the lyre,
My talents sink below my proud desire ;

Who often doubt, and sometimes credit give,
 When friends assure me that my verse will live ;
 Whom health, too tender for the bustling throng,
 Led into pensive shade and soothing song ;
 Whatever fortune my unpolished rhymes
 May meet, in present or in future times,
 Let the blest art my grateful thoughts employ,
 Which soothes my sorrow and augments my joy ;
 Whence lonely peace and social pleasure springs,
 And friendship, dearer than the smile of kings.
 While keener poets, querulously proud,
 Lament the ill of poesy aloud,
 And magnify, with irritation's zeal,
 Those common evils we too strongly feel,
 The envious comment, and the subtle style
 Of specious slander, stabbing with a smile ;
 Frankly I wish to make her blessings known,
 And think those blessings for her ills atone ;
 Nor would my honest pride that praise forego,
 Which makes Malignity yet more my foe.

If heart-felt pain e'er led me to accuse
 The dangerous gift of the alluring Muse,
 'Twas in the moment when my verse impressed
 Some anxious feelings on a Mother's breast.

O thou fond Spirit, who with pride hast smiled,
 And frowned with fear, on thy poetic child,
 Pleased, yet alarmed, when, in his boyish time,
 He sighed in numbers, or he laughed in rhyme ;
 While thy kind cautions warned him to beware
 Of Penury, the bard's perpetual snare ;
 Marking the early temper of his soul,
 Careless of wealth, nor fit for base control :
 Thou tender Saint, to whom he owes much more
 Than ever Child to Parent owed before ;
 In life's first season, when the fever's flame
 Shrunk to deformity his shrivelled frame,
 And turned each fairer image in his brain
 To blank confusion and her crazy train,
 'Twas thine, with constant love, through lingering years
 To bathe thy Idiot Orphan in thy tears ;
 Day after day, and night succeeding night,
 To turn incessant to the hideous sight,
 And frequent watch, if haply at thy view,
 Departed Reason might not dawn anew :
 Though medicinal art, with pitying care,
 Could lend no aid to save thee from despair,
 Thy fond maternal heart adhered to Hope and Prayer ; }

Nor prayed in vain ; thy child, from Powers above,
 Received the sense to feel and bless thy love.
 O might he thence receive the happy skill
 And force proportioned to his ardent will,
 With Truth's unfading radiance to emblaze
 Thy virtues, worthy of immortal praise !

Nature, who decked thy form with beauty's flowers,
 Exhausted on thy soul her finer powers ;
 Taught it with all her energy to feel
 Love's melting softness, friendship's fervid zeal,
 The generous purpose and the active thought,
 With Charity's diffusive spirit fraught.
 There all the best of mental gifts she placed,
 Vigor of judgment, purity of taste,
 Superior parts without their spleenful leaven,
 Kindness to earth, and confidence in Heaven.
 While my fond thoughts o'er all thy merits roll,
 Thy praise thus gushes from my filial soul ;
 Nor will the public with harsh rigor blame
 This my just homage to thy honored name :
 To please that public, if to please be mine,
 Thy virtues trained me, — let the praise be thine.

Essay on Epic Poetry, ep. iv.⁷

Cowper and Hayley, as they resembled each other in having withdrawn at about the same time of life into retirement, and in the pleasure and consolation which they derived from their poetical pursuits, had also many points of coincidence in their general views and feelings. Different as the character of their poetry is, each aimed always at a moral end. "It seems," said Hayley, when he published the most fanciful and the most fortunate of his works, — "It seems to be a kind of duty incumbent on those who devote themselves to poetry, to raise, if possible, the dignity of a declining art, by making it as beneficial to life and manners as the limits of composition and the character of modern times will allow. The ages indeed are past, in which the

⁷ Of this Essay it is that Gibbon says in one of his Letters, "I hope you like Mr. Hayley's poem. He rises with his subject ; and, since Pope's death, I am satisfied that England has not seen so happy a mixture of strong sense and flowing numbers. Are you not delighted with his address to his mother ? I understand that she was in plain prose every thing which he speaks of her in verse." — *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. ii. p. 259.

song of the Poet was idolized for its miraculous effects ; yet a poem, intended to promote the cultivation of good humor, may still, perhaps, be fortunate enough to prove of some little service to society in general ; or, if this idea may be thought too chimerical and romantic by sober reason, it is at least one of those pleasing and innocent delusions, in which a poetical enthusiast may be safely indulged.”—“His observation,” he said, “of the various effects of spleen on the female character, induced him to believe that he might render an important service to social life, if his poetry could induce his young and fair readers to cultivate the gentle qualities of the heart, and maintain a constant flow of good humor. With this view he composed his “*Triumphs of Temper*,” and he had once the gratification to hear from “the very good and sensible mother of a large family,” that she was indebted to that poem for a complete reformation in the character of her eldest daughter, who, from being perverse and intractable, was rendered, by her ambition to imitate *Serena*, the most docile and dutiful of children. This book retained its popularity more than twenty years, being one of those which were chiefly purchased for presents, and for which, therefore, there was a continual demand. It may be doubted whether, among all those by which it has been superseded, there has been any so likely to produce upon readers at a certain time of life, when the mind most easily receives its bias, so good an effect.

That poem raised Hayley’s reputation to its highest pitch ; to him, as the most popular of living poets, the laureateship was “graciously offered” upon Warton’s death, and was “as graciously declined in a few verses to Mr. Pitt on the occasion ;”⁸ and he had a more remarkable proof of his own celebrity, when, upon going to a nursery garden near London, and offering to pay for a plant which he had chosen, the nursery-man, Mr. Lee, having discovered who he was, refused to accept the money, and said, “Sir, you are a very great man, to whom I shall be particularly happy to show every little civility in my power. I am sorry that my lame

* *Memoirs of Thomas Alphonso Hayley*, p. 35.

foot and your haste prevent my making up a nosegay for the lady in the carriage."

His reputation, however, was no sooner at the full than it began to wane. Some critics, in the exercise of their vocation, took more pleasure in exposing his faults than in praising him for what was praiseworthy; in journals which at the commencement of his career had been friendly to him, there arose other writers "who knew not Hayley;" like every successful author, he had provoked some envy; and like every incautious one, some enemies. He incurred a certain degree of censure for the lax tone of morals in two prose works, which, though published anonymously, were known to be his; and in the same Essay wherein he apostrophized Gibbon as one on whom

Mistaken zeal, wrapt in a priestly pall,
Had from the baser urn poured darkest gall,

he offended the infidels by lamenting the historian's⁹ infidelity.

Think not my verse means blindly to engage
In rash defence of thy profaner page!
Though keen her spirit, her attachment fond,
Base service cannot suit with friendship's bond.
Too firm from duty's sacred path to turn,
She breathes an honest sigh of deep concern,
And pities Genius, when his wild career
Gives Faith a wound, or Innocence a fear.

The friends of Hume took umbrage at the manner in which his history¹⁰ was censured; and the friends of War-

⁹ How this should have appeared violent to Dr. Robertson is marvellous. "Who is this Mr. Hayley?" he says in a letter to Gibbon, (1781.) "His poetry has more merit than that of most of his contemporaries; but his Whiggism is so bigoted, and his Christianity so fierce, that he almost disgusts one with two very good things." — *Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works*, vol. ii. p. 256.

If there be any thing in the Essay on History (which is the work to which Robertson alludes) fiercer than the milky passage quoted in the text, I have not been able to discover it.

¹⁰ Emerging from the sophists' school,
With spirit eager, yet with judgment cool;
With subtle skill to steal upon applause,
And give false vigor to the weaker cause;

burton (for Warburton had friends, and deserved to have them) were not less displeased at seeing his works treated with unwarrantable contempt. Hayley thus purchased for himself unfavorable opinions from opposite quarters; and though time had taught him not to appreciate his own powers too highly, it mortified¹¹ him to feel that he was sinking in estimation with the public. When he characterized Hume's fame as a waxen fabric, he had not questioned himself whether his own was of a more durable material. His Essays were valuable only because of the information which they contained; there was nothing in the poetry that could invite a second perusal. In the *Triumphs of Temper*, he had addressed himself *virginibus puerisque*; to such readers it was more useful, because better adapted and more acceptable than any more serious or elevated strain; but with the general public his reputation had quietly declined. A better taste had gradually grown up. The public were no longer comprised in "the Town;" nor were the rising generation of poets contented, like their predecessors, to be known by the appellation of Wits; they had been recalled to the study of nature, and had been led to drink at the wells of English undefiled. More than any other poet, Cowper had contributed to establish this reformation, and the decline of Hayley's celebrity was an inevitable conse-

To paint a specious scene with nicest art,
Retouch the whole, and varnish every part;
Graceful in style, in argument acute,
Master of every trick in keen dispute;
With these strong powers to form a winning tale,
And hide Deceit in Moderation's veil,
High on the pinnacle of Fashion placed,
Hume shone the idol of historic taste.
Already, pierced by Freedom's searching rays,
The waxen fabric of his fame decays!

Ep. li. v. 548.—61.

¹¹ Miss Seward, after an unexpected visit (1789) from "the illustrious, the graceful Hayley," says, "The nonsense and malice of the public critics seem to have given him the same disgust at the idea of publishing that sickens upon my spirit, and slackens all my nerves of poetic industry." — *Letters*, vol. ii. p. 272.

Speaking of Maty's Review, she says, (1788,) "Never shall I forget his long, elaborate, confused, and stupid critique upon Hayley's beautiful *Triumphs of Temper*. This same critique places its author amongst the minor poets of the present period. O the Midas! the Midas! From that moment I never looked into Maty-trash. It was no meat for me." — *Ib.* p. 7.

quence. Merry's sky-rockets and Darwin's gas-lights would have thrown it into shade no longer than while they lasted.

But Hayley was incapable of envy, incapable of looking upon any man as his rival; in every sense of the word, he was one of the most generous of men. His friendship for Cowper could not have been more sincere, if it had been of old standing and slow growth; and it had the ardor of novelty to animate it. Cowper, having been equally taken with his guest, had explained to him the state of his own circumstances; and Hayley's first thought was, that it might be practicable to procure a pension for him through Thurlow's influence. He had published an unsuccessful¹² poem on the anniversary of the Revolution, which poem he had sent to the Chancellor, and received from him a complimentary note of acknowledgment.¹³ But he had a friend, Carwardine by name, whom he rarely mentions without some epithet indicative of cordial regard, who, being intimate with both, had long wished to make them acquainted with each other, especially as both were admirers and friends of his

¹² The history of this composition is somewhat curious. "The poet (*Poeta loquitur*) was called to London by a pressing solicitation from his esteemed friend Dr. Kippis, to gratify the votaries of constitutional liberty, by a poem on the anniversary, which the admirers of King William were preparing to celebrate. The invitation was in unison with the poet's principles and feelings; but he had hardly reached his cell in Barnard's Inn, where he wished to compose the occasional poem requested, when a new affliction threw a gloom over his mind." — This was the sudden death of one of his earliest and most beloved friends. Having written an epitaph for him, "the poet endeavored to soothe and fortify his mind under his recent affliction, by celebrating the hero William, the deliverer of England and of Europe." — *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 367, 8.

¹³ "The Chancellor presents his best respects to Mr. Hayley, and returns him many thanks for his poems. They give a bright relief to the subject. William is much obliged to him, and Mary more; and if it may be said without offence, liberty itself derives advantage from this dress."

"There's flattery for you, from the great!" says Hayley. "I told the angelic Cracherode, this morning, that I called on him to give me a sermon on humility, lest my head should turn with the adulation I have received." The poet (*Poeta loquitur*) might have found a sufficient antidote against vanity on this occasion, in the very moderate sale of his production, which, "though well recited at a very numerous public meeting, and extolled by many private friends, was very far from becoming popular." — *Ib.* 368, 9.

own friend Romney. This object was accomplished ; and Hayley became sufficiently acquainted with Thurlow, to flatter himself that he stood high in his good graces. He now hoped that this influence might be usefully exerted in Cowper's behalf.

"Can I ever honor you enough for your zeal to serve me?" says Cowper on this occasion.¹⁴ "Truly I think not. I am, however, so sensible of the love I owe you on this account, that I every day regret the acuteness of your feelings for me, convinced that they expose you to much trouble, mortification, and disappointment. I have, in short, a poor opinion of my destiny, as I told you when you were here ; and though I believe that if any man living can do me good, you will, I cannot yet persuade myself that even you will be successful in attempting it. But it is no matter ; you are yourself a good which I can never value enough ; and whether rich or poor in other respects, I shall always account myself better provided for than I deserve, with such a friend at my back as you. Let it please God to continue to me my William and Mary, and I will be more reasonable than to grumble."

To Lady Hesketh he says,¹⁵ after saying that every body must fall in love with Hayley, "the Chancellor, I am willing to hope, will not be the only insensible. But I am less sanguine in my expectations in that, and indeed in every other quarter, where my interest is concerned, than either he or you. Depend on it, my dear, I was born to be poor ; and though Hayley would enrich me, if any mortal could, having such zeal and such talents as usually carry all before them, my destiny, I fear, will prove too hard for him."

Perhaps Hayley himself, if he had not happily been always of a hopeful disposition, might have come to a like conclusion, when having, upon his arrival in London, written a note to the Chancellor, requesting an appointment to breakfast, so long a time elapsed without his receiving an answer, that it seemed as if it had either been forgotten, or, which was more likely, that there was no intention of answering it. It happened, however, that Carwardine was

¹⁴ June 5, 1792.

¹⁵ June 6.

about to send Cowper's poems as a present to the Chancellor's daughter ; he took this fair occasion for writing a second note. The appointment was then made, and Hayley immediately communicated the result to Weston in these words — "Huzza ! I have passed an agreeable hour, from eight to nine this morning, with the Chancellor, and left both him and Lord Kenyon, who was with us, so impressed with warm wishes to serve you, that I am persuaded your old friend Thurlow will accomplish it if possible." Thurlow, it appears, till undeceived at this interview, had supposed Cowper to be rich : some one had told him so, who, knowing that lawyers, in proportion as they gain reputation, acquire wealth, concluded that the case must be the same with authors.

Hayley's letters, with Mrs. Unwin's gradual amendment, and the physician's confident expectation of her recovery, raised Cowper's spirits, and he began to look forward with hope to his intended journey. August had been named for it at first ; but when Hayley advised July, for the sake of having longer days before them, he assented to the argument. "This, however," said he,¹⁶ "must be left to the Giver of all good. If our visit to you be according to his will, He will smooth our way before us, and appoint the time of it ; and thus I speak, not because I wish to seem a saint in your eyes, but because my poor Mary actually is one, and would not set her foot over the threshold, unless she had, or thought she had, God's free permission. With that she would go through floods and fire, though without it she would be afraid of every thing, — afraid even to visit you, dearly as she loves, and much as she longs to see you."

The intervening weeks were eventful ones in Cowper's little circle. Sir John Throckmorton having removed into Oxfordshire, upon succeeding to the baronetcy, Weston Hall became the residence of his brother George, who had now taken the name of Courtenay, and at this time brought home his bride there, the Catharine of Cowper's poems. Johnny of Norfolk came again to visit his kinsman. "How do you imagine I have been occupied these last ten days?"

says Cowper to Mr. Bull.¹⁷ "In sitting, — not on cockatrice eggs, nor yet to gratify a mere idle humor, nor because I was too sick to move — but because my cousin Johnson has an aunt who has a longing desire of my picture, and because he would therefore bring a painter from London to draw it. For this purpose I have been sitting, as I say, these ten days, and am heartily glad that my sitting time is over." To Hayley he says,

Abbot is painting me so true,
That (trust me) you would stare,
And hardly know, at the first view,
If I were here or there.

In the opinion of all who saw the portrait at that time, and in Cowper's own, the artist had succeeded to admiration. "I think," he says to Lady Hesketh,¹⁸ "it will afford you as much pleasure, nay, perhaps even more, than a sight of the original myself; for you will see it with the thought in your mind, that whether I live or die, while this picture subsists, my charming lineaments and proportions can never be forgotten. — I verily think the portrait, exclusive of the likeness, which is the closest imaginable, one of the best I ever saw."

"But the picture," said he to Mr. Bull,¹⁹ "is not the only prodigy I have to tell you of. A greater belongs to me, and one that you will hardly credit, even on my own testimony. We are on the eve of a journey, and a long one. On this very day se'nnight, we set out for Eartham, the seat of my brother bard, Mr. Hayley, on the other side of London, nobody knows where, a hundred and twenty miles off. Pray for us, my friend, that we may have a safe going and return! It is a tremendous exploit, and I feel a thousand anxieties when I think of it. But a promise made to him when he was here, that we would go if we could, and a sort of persuasion that we can if we will, oblige us to it." To Mr. Newton he says,²⁰ "You may imagine that we, who have been resident on one spot so many years, do not engage in such an enterprise without some

¹⁷ July 25.

¹⁸ July 25.

¹⁹ July 21.

²⁰ July 30.

anxiety: persons accustomed to travel would make themselves merry with mine, it seems so disproportioned to the occasion. Once I have been on the point of determining not to go, and even since we fixed the day, — my troubles have been so insupportable. But it has been made a matter of much prayer; and at last it has pleased God to satisfy me, in some measure, that his will corresponds with our purpose, and that he will afford us his protection.”

Mr. Newton had recently made him a transient visit. “I rejoiced,” says Cowper, “and had reason to do so, in your coming to Weston, for I think the Lord came with you. Not indeed to abide with me; not to restore me to that intercourse with him which I enjoyed twenty years ago; but to awaken in me, however, more spiritual feeling than I have experienced, except in two instances, during all that time. The comforts that I had received under your ministry, in better days, all rushed upon my recollection; and, during two or three transient moments, seemed to be in a degree renewed. You will tell me that, transient as they were, they were yet evidence of a love that is not so; and I am desirous to believe it.”

There was a time when both Cowper and Mrs. Unwin reposed the most entire confidence in Mr. Newton. He had lost some of his influence over them, perhaps in consequence of having improperly asserted it; certain, however, it is, that they did not communicate to him a very singular proceeding in which they were then engaged, and in which Mrs. Unwin never would have partaken, nor have permitted Cowper to engage, if her intellect had not been impaired. Cowper's attack in 1787 had been more formidable than that in 1773; he had attempted suicide, and would have effected it, if Mrs. Unwin had not providentially entered the place in which he had suspended himself by the neck, and had she not also possessed presence of mind enough to cut him down. The former malady was of much longer duration, and the recovery had been slow: in the latter it was instantaneous. The same dreadful delusion concerning his present rejection and probable reprobation continued in both cases, after his restoration; and from the time of the last seizure his nervous system remained always in a state of

deceased activity. Most persons know by their own experience, that in what is called "the vapors," objects pass before our closed eyes with all the vividness and distinctness of reality. The sense of hearing is subject to the same kind of illusion, (though the phenomenon is far less frequent,) and articulated sounds are as actually heard in the one case, as forms and faces are seen in the other. The visual illusion Cowper would have understood, even in his disordered state of mind; but to the audible one he gave entire credit. It was more particularly upon waking in the morning, or in the night, that he expected to hear something; something was generally heard in consequence of that expectation; and whatever words came to his inward ear, he considered as oracular.

There was a poor schoolmaster at Olney, Teedon by name, who was one of Cowper and Mrs. Unwin's pensioners. They pitied his poverty, tolerated his ridiculous vanity, and forgave his intrusions. While Unwin lived, Teedon was never mentioned in their correspondence but in a manner which showed that though they entertained a compassionate regard for him, they were fully aware of his conceitedness and his folly. When Cowper, in a letter to this most familiar of his friends, hoped the *Monthly Review* might be favorable to his first volume, for the sake of his Olney neighbors, who took their opinions from that journal, he said,²¹ "Not to mention others, here is your idol, Mr. Teedon, whose smile is praise." In a subsequent letter,²² he related an anecdote, which sufficiently characterizes the man: "Mr. Teedon, who favors us now and then with his company in an evening, as usual, was not long since discoursing, with that eloquence which is so peculiar to himself, on the many providential interpositions that had taken place in his favor. 'He had wished for many things, (he said,) which, at the time when he formed those wishes, seemed distant and improbable, some of them indeed impossible. Among other wishes that he had indulged, one was, that he might be connected with men of genius and ability, — and in my connection with this worthy gentleman (said he, turn-

²¹ See vol. i. pp. 257, 258.

²² Feb. 7, 1785.

ing to me,) that wish, I am sure, is amply gratified.' You may suppose that I felt the sweat gush out upon my forehead when I heard that speech; and if you do, you will not be at all mistaken, so much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense."

Yet, clearly as Cowper then saw the ridiculous points in this man's character, he began at length to agree with him in the notion that he was especially favored by Providence; to communicate his waking dreams to him, and to consult him as a person whom the Lord was pleased to answer in prayer. It is possible that when Mrs. Unwin found this was not to be prevented, she may have fallen in with it, knowing that Teedon would, of course, endeavor always to remove his distressing impressions, and encourage him by hopeful interpretations, and thinking that one delusion might thus be counteracted by another. But as her own mind failed, she appears to have caught her poor companion's insanity upon this point; had her son been living, he would have prevented a folly, which could not have been concealed from him in his visits, even if they had not been withheld from it by their love and deference for him. As for the schoolmaster, when he perceived in what light he was considered by two persons whom he had been accustomed to look up to as greatly his superiors, neither his vanity nor his modesty would allow him to question their discernment. No suspicion of knavery attaches to him, for he was a simple-hearted creature; as they would have him to be a sort of high priest *incog.*, such he fancied himself to be, and consulted his internal Urim and Thummim with happy and untroubled confidence.

The earliest notice of these pitiable consultations relates to the proposed edition of Milton. "Mrs. Unwin thanks Mr. Teedon for his letters, and is glad to find the Lord gives him so great encouragement to proceed, by shining on his addresses, and quickening him by his word. Mrs. Unwin acknowledges the Lord's goodness, which is mixed with the many and various trials He sees fit to visit his servants with. There is no doubt but that there is a need-be for the manifold temptations to which they are exposed by night and by day. In his own best time he will appear for

them.”²³ In the week following,²⁴ “Mrs. Unwin has the satisfaction of informing Mr. Teedon, that Mr. Cowper is tranquil this morning, and that with this which Mr. Teedon receives, a letter by the post, decisive of his undertaking the important business, will go by the same messenger. May the Lord speed it! His glory, the good of many, and our comfort, form the basis of his determination. Mr. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin are agreed that it was hardly possible to find out a reference to the great point in Mr. Teedon’s first letter; his second favor elucidated the whole, and removed all doubts. They hope Mr. Teedon will continue to help them with his prayers on this occasion; and wish that every blessing bestowed upon them may be doubled to him.” Another note, which must have been written soon afterwards, says, “Mr. Cowper desires Mrs. Unwin to acquaint Mr. Teedon, that his anxiety did not arise from any difficulties he apprehended in the performance of his work, but his uncertainty whether he was providentially called to it or not. He is now clearly persuaded, by Mr. Teedon’s experiences and gracious notices, that he is called to it, and is therefore perfectly easy. Mr. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin thank Mr. Teedon for the interesting part he takes in this affair, and hope the Lord will continue to enable him not only to persevere, but also to feel a blessing in it, to his own self, spiritually and personally. Mr. Cowper begs Mr. Teedon will be very earnest in prayer, that the possession of peace he now enjoys may be continued to him.”²⁵

These notes were written some three months before Mrs. Unwin had that first fit, which was followed in the course of the spring by a paralytic stroke. But her health had for some time been declining, and her mind had been impaired with it, so that she confirmed Cowper in a delusion from which her influence might otherwise have preserved him. He who had formerly regarded Teedon with as much derision as was compatible with real kindness to the poor creature himself, and with his own compassionate nature, consulted him now on his hopes and fears, his dreams, his

²³ Sept. 1, 1791.

²⁴ Sept. 7.

²⁵ Appendix to Gauntlett’s Sermons, vol. ii. pp. 387, 8

waking impressions, and his engagement, and carefully wrote in a book the oracular responses which he received, till he had filled volumes. When he told Mr. Newton that their intended visit to Hayley had been made the subject of much prayer, and that it had pleased God to satisfy him in some measure concerning it, there can be no doubt that he alluded to the encouragement which Teedon had given him.

July had far advanced when Cowper wrote to Lady Hesketh,²⁶ saying they had not even yet determined absolutely on their journey to Eartham, — “but shall (he added) I believe, in two or three days, decide in favor of it. Hayley interests himself so much in favor of it, and I am persuaded that it bids fair to do us both so much good, that I am sincerely desirous of going. A thousand lions, monsters, and giants, are in the way, but perhaps they will all vanish, if I have but the courage to face them. Mrs. Unwin, whose weakness might justify her fears, has none. Her trust in the providence of God makes her calm on all occasions.” On that day, however, the determination was made, and Cowper announced it in the gayety of excited spirits to his host expectant.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Weston, July 22, 1792.

This important affair, my dear brother, is at last decided, and we are coming. Wednesday se’nnight, if nothing occur to make a later day necessary, is the day fixed for our journey. Our rate of travelling must depend on Mary’s ability to bear it. Our mode of travelling will occupy three days, unavoidably, for we shall come in a coach. Abbot finishes my picture to-morrow; on Wednesday he returns to town, and is commissioned to order one down for us, with four steeds to draw it;

————— “hollow pampered jades of Asia,
That cannot go but forty miles a day.”

Send us our route, for I am as ignorant of it, almost, as if I were in a strange country. We shall reach St. Alban’s, I

²⁶ July 21.

suppose, the first day ; say where we must finish our second day's journey, and at what inn we may best repose. As to the end of the third day, we know where that will find us, viz. in the arms and under the roof of our beloved Hayley.

General Cowper, having heard a rumor of this intended migration, desires to meet me on the road, that we may once more see each other. He lives at Ham, near Kingston. Shall we go through Kingston, or near it? For I would give him as little trouble as possible, though he offers very kindly to come as far as Barnet for that purpose. Nor must I forget Carwardine, who so kindly desired to be informed what way we should go. On what point of the road will it be easiest for him to find us? On all these points you must be my oracle. My friend and brother, we shall overwhelm you with our numbers ; this is all the trouble that I have left. My Johnny of Norfolk, happy in the thought of accompanying us, would be broken-hearted to be left behind.

In the midst of all these solitudes, I laugh to think what they are made of, and what an important thing it is for me to travel. Other men steal away from their homes silently, and make no disturbance ; but when I move, houses are turned upside down, maids are turned out of their beds, all the counties through which I pass appear to be in an uproar. Surrey greets me by the mouth of the General, and Essex by that of Carwardine. How strange does all this seem to a man who has seen no bustle, and made none, for twenty years together ! Adieu.

W. C.

A second letter informed Hayley that the purpose held good, though he had once been on the point of abandoning it.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Weston, July 29, 1792.

Through floods and flames, to your retreat
I win my desperate way,
And when we meet, if e'er we meet,
Will echo your huzza!

You will wonder at the word *desperate* in the second line, and at the *if* in the third; but could you have any conception of the fears I have had to battle with, of the dejection of spirits that I have suffered concerning this journey, you would wonder much more that I still courageously persevere in my resolution to undertake it. Fortunately for my intentions, it happens, that as the day approaches my terrors abate; for had they continued to be what they were a week since, I must, after all, have disappointed you; and was actually once on the verge of doing it. I have told you something of my nocturnal experiences, and assure you now, that they were hardly ever more terrific than on this occasion. Prayer has, however, opened my passage at last, and obtained for me a degree of confidence, that, I trust, will prove a comfortable viaticum to me all the way. On Wednesday, therefore, we set forth.

The terrors, that I have spoken of, would appear ridiculous to most; but to you they will not, for you are a reasonable creature, and know well, that to whatever cause it be owing, (whether to constitution, or to God's express appointment,) I am hunted by spiritual hounds in the night season. I cannot help it. You will pity me, and wish it were otherwise; and though you may think there is much of the imaginary in it, will not deem it for that reason an evil less to be lamented. So much for fears and distresses. Soon, I hope, they shall all have a joyful termination, and I, my Mary, my Johnny, and my dog, be skipping with delight at Earham.

Well! this picture is at last finished, and well finished, I can assure you. Every creature that has seen it has been astonished at the resemblance. Sam's boy bowed to it, and Beau walked up to it, wagging his tail as he went, and evi-

dently showing that he acknowledged its likeness to his master. It is a half-length, as it is technically, but absurdly called; that is to say, it gives all but the foot and ankle. To-morrow it goes to town, and will hang some months at Abbot's, when it will be sent to its due destination in Norfolk.

I hope, or rather wish, that at Eartham I may recover that habit of study, which, inveterate as it once seemed, I now seem to have lost, — lost to such a degree, that it is even painful to me to think of what it will cost me to acquire it again.

Adieu! my dear, dear Hayley; God give us a happy meeting! Mary sends her love. She is in pretty good plight this morning, having slept well, and, for her part, has no fears at all about the journey.

Ever yours,

W. C.

Eartham, where Hayley then resided, is about six miles from Chichester, and five from Arundel, a little to the left of the road. His father had, in the year 1743, purchased a small estate in the village, and the ruins of a mansion which had belonged to a certain Sir Robert Fagg, once celebrated in provincial song for having stood for the county and polled two votes. "A sequestered spot, Hayley calls it, peculiarly embellished by nature." The purchaser removed the ruins, and built a diminutive villa, on higher ground, as a kind of summer-house, to which he occasionally sent his children from Chichester, for the benefit of better air. Five years after the purchase, his remains were deposited in Eartham churchyard. This little establishment was censured as an act of extravagance in one who had considerably impaired his patrimony; to his son, however, it proved, in process of time, a singular source of health and delight. It had remained untenanted for some years, and of course had suffered considerably, before Hayley rendered it habitable for a tenant; and when he went to reside there, in 1774, it was with the intention of enlarging and decorating it, and making it his chosen abode for the

rest of his life. His expectations of happiness were expressed in some elegiac stanzas, addressed to his wife.

Swift come the day, when we shall well exchange
Thy dust, O London, and thy noisy throng,
For fields where leisure may unbounded range,
Listening to health and pleasure's sprightly song!

And thou, sweet Eartham! dear retreat, receive
Thy fond possessor in no ill-starred hour;
Ne'er will he wish thy tranquil shades to leave,
And fly ignobly to the shrines of power.

No; he will wish (nor let that wish be vain!)
To aid thy charms with independent pride;
To rear the peaceful grove where Love shall reign,
And raise the roof where Friendship shall preside.

Perchance, long banished from his failing eyes,
The heroic Muse will come, with all her fire:
Yes, in thy shades her sacred form will rise,
And strike to Liberty the lofty lyre.

Eliza, too, enamored of thy bower,
Will make thee, Eartham, her peculiar care;
And court, to grace thee, every cloyer flower
That yields reluctant to the vernal air.

* * *

Nor this alone, but far superior care
Eliza's gentle, generous heart will know;
She to the afflicted cottage will repair,
And soothe the villager's heart-rending woe.

Where'er she comes, with no unkind delay,
The infant tenants will with transport bound;
Her smile will chase oppressive want away,
And spread a little holiday around.

Some of these dreams were fulfilled, but neither the most ambitious, nor the most amiable of them. The heroic Muse did not visit him at Eartham; and among all his enjoyments there, that of domestic happiness was wanting. When Hayley communicated to his mother his intention of marrying one whom she had known intimately for many years, she reminded him that Eliza's mother had been in a

state of mental derangement from the time of her daughter's birth, and asked him to consider what his feelings would be if he should ever see his wife in the same condition. "I have asked my own heart that question," he replied, "and I will tell you its immediate answer. In that case I should bless God for having given me courage sufficient to make myself the legal guardian of the most amiable and most pitiable woman on earth." "My dear child," she replied, "I have done. Your heart is very pure; your feelings are quick and strong; your intentions are always kind. I will not thwart your affections, but only pray to Heaven that they may be rendered the source of lasting happiness to yourself." The mother's apprehensions were more nearly verified than the son's confidence in his own sense of duty; but happily for herself, she died before the infelicities and irregularities of his domestic life began.

The morbid tendency that Mrs. Hayley had inherited, never affected her intellect; but it manifested itself in sudden fluctuations of spirits, extreme irritability, and restlessness. He calls her his "pitiable Eliza," speaks of her "marvellous mental infelicities," and says that her state of mind was to all, who tenderly regarded her, an evil more distressing than madness itself. At times, suspicion and pride were its chief characteristics, at other times depression and melancholy. He was involved, he says, in scenes of anguish and affliction, with which no human powers appeared strong enough incessantly to contend. Jealousy, however, made no part of their unhappiness; for when Hayley had granted himself a patriarch's license, she, with equal complacency, absolved him from the obligation of conjugal fidelity, and, having no children herself, adopted, from his birth, one whom he named Thomas Alphonso Hayley. It was not till several years after the birth of this child that they finally separated, upon amicable terms. Mrs. Hayley was settled at Derby, where she had many acquaintances; she was still proud of her husband, though love had long ceased to have any place in her breast; she kept up a frequent correspondence with him, and in her cheerful moods, generally addressed him by the name of Hotspur.

Neither party seems to have been rendered unhappy by their separation. Mrs. Hayley was remarkable for a want of feeling as peculiar as her excessive irritability ; and her husband, under the severest sorrows, found relief in giving them utterance, and with his happy activity of mind was never in want of some object to occupy and amuse him. Except in his dream of connubial happiness, no man was ever less disappointed in his hopes than Hayley in those expectations with which he entered upon his abode at Eartham. He had inherited from his father, he says, "a passion for the spot, a passion also for building and gardening, for pictures and for books ; and a contempt for money, romantic and imprudent." Luckily he did not inherit his father's taste in building, as well as his passion for it ; for the elder Hayley, a little before his decease, had begun to construct an additional apartment to his house at Chichester, of so singular a form, that the least improbable guess which could be formed of his intention, conjectured it to be meant for "a diminutive representation of the mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople !" The son began his improvements at Eartham "with more attention to economy, and more convenience than he usually exerted, adding only such offices and chambers as were absolutely requisite for his family." But as he went on embellishing his garden and enlarging his house, "he was willing to believe that the success of his writings would ultimately repay him for whatever he expended in decorating a favorite scene of study and retirement." This he confesses sometimes appeared to him like running a race in a sack ; though his friends might have observed that, on the contrary, he could not have devised a surer means of outrunning the constable. But on that score he never suffered any serious uneasiness ; his habits were inexpensive, his patrimony had been well husbanded by a careful mother during his long minority ; and when at length he might otherwise have been straitened in his circumstances, his connection with Cowper became the means of placing him at ease, in a remarkable manner, for the last twenty years of his life.

He made this residence a delightful spot. Gibbon called it the little Paradise of Eartham. "His place," said the his-

torian, "though small, is as elegant as his mind, which I value much more highly;" and communicating to Lord Sheffield a wish which Hayley had expressed to become acquainted with him, he adds that this was "no vulgar compliment." Hayley is now estimated only by his writings, and these, because they were greatly overrated in their day, have perhaps been depreciated since in proportion. But the person of whom Gibbon could speak thus, must have been no ordinary man. Literary acquirements like his were rare at that time, and are not common now; and these were not his only accomplishments. All who knew him concur in describing his manners as in the highest degree winning, and his conversation as delightful. It is said that few men have ever rendered so many essential acts of kindness to those who stood in need of them. His errors were neither few nor trifling; but his good qualities greatly preponderated. He was a most affectionate father, a most warm and constant friend; and his latter days of infirmity and pain were distinguished by no common degree of cheerful fortitude and Christian resignation.

Eartham had received many distinguished guests, whose names will not be forgotten in the history of English literature and English art. Howard, who belongs to a different class of worthies, visited his encomiast there. Gibbon has already been mentioned. Romney and Flaxman were frequent visitors, being, indeed, two of Hayley's most intimate friends. Joseph Warton. Sargent, the author of the *Mine*, a good and amiable man, not to be mentioned without respect. Nor will I add Miss Seward's name to the list without rendering justice to one who has been greatly disparaged, chiefly because of her affected style. She was a woman whose talents, if her language had not been distorted by false notions of excellence in composition, might have retained for her the high station among female writers, which in her palmy days it was allowed that she had won. Though not always a judicious critic, she was never unjust or ungenerous in her censures; and if she frequently mistook glittering faults for beauties, no beauty ever escaped her observation. I have never known any person to whose frankness and perfect candor I could with more confidence bear testimony. It was not in mere vanity that she received all

the incense which was profusely offered her, but because she believed others to be as sincere as herself.

Hayley was now expecting a guest very unlike any of those whose occasional visits had rendered Eartham a distinguished spot, giving it a celebrity which it will not lose. Since he passed through London, on his return from Weston, Thurlow had ceased to be Chancellor. This unexpected event abated the hope which he had reasonably entertained of serving Cowper through that channel; but with that buoyant and happy disposition which makes the best of every thing, he thought it would gratify Cowper in another way, if, now that Thurlow was master of his own time, he could bring about a meeting between them. Accordingly he wrote to the Ex-Chancellor, what Miss Seward would have called, this truly Hayleyan epistle: —²⁷

MY DEAR LORD,

Eartham, near Chichester, July 1, 1792.

May I, without impertinence, speak to you again on paper, after having so recently trespassed on your time in person, and talked, I fear, with more zeal than discretion?

Yes, now your hand, with decent pride,
Relinquishes that seal unstained
Which Bacon, Law's less upright guide,
With many a sordid spot profaned; —

Haply from cumbrous pomp released,
You now, escaping thorny strife,
Have time to grace a Hermit's feast,
And honor sweet, sequestered life.

Here nature reigns o'er souls elate;
Her tranquil smiles this scene endear:
And Fancy, Freedom, Friendship wait
To hail their favorite Cowper here.

To dignify this dear retreat,
Would I could tempt you to descend,
And in our first of Poets meet,
Life's richest gift, an ancient friend!

Our dear William of Weston, my lord, has kindly promised to accelerate his intended visit to the south, and to be

²⁷ I am obliged to Mr. Carwardine, the son of Hayley's friend, for this curious letter.

with me in July : if, in your summer excursion, you are led towards the south coast, how happy should I be to present to you, under my roof, the man you honored with your early regard, and to hear him say to you, as his brother Horace said to a patron of a weaker spirit,

Primâ dicte mihi, summâ dicende Camenâ !

At all events, it is the delight and pride of my heart to have thoroughly revealed to your lordship *all the iniquity of fortune* towards an author, whose merits and whose misfortunes are so various and so extraordinary. If you can find or create an opportunity of redressing that iniquity, I am persuaded that your lordship will regard it as one of the most happy, — and assuredly men of letters will esteem it as one of the most honorable, — incidents in a long life of honor.

When talents and virtues a mortal endear,
Yet fail to preserve him from Fortune's control,
Who binds her weak captive in Want's narrow sphere,
With Adversity's irons that enter the soul ; —

Say, is it not, Thurlow ! an office divine,
With the firm hand of friendship to cancel such wrongs ?
May the verses of Cowper proclaim it is thine,
While genius and gratitude hallow his songs !

If I pester you, my lord, with prose and rhyme, it may yet comfort you to reflect, that you are in no danger of receiving, either from your old friend or from me, any *doses of adulation*. I have even had the assurance to show you, more than once, that my opinions, on some points, are directly opposite to yours. I believe you are one of the few great men in the world, whom a little man may venture to contradict, without the hazard of making an enemy. No trifling eulogy, my lord ! and I am greatly deceived, indeed, if it is not true.

The more just it is, the more pleasure it would give me to receive you in this poetical hermitage, a little temple consecrated to Liberty and Friendship, where difference of opinion produces no hatred, and similarity of pursuit no jealousy.

A famous monarch used, you know, to say that in serving an individual, he generally made one man ungrateful, and many discontented. What a rare blessing, then, my lord, may be yours, since, in serving one poet, you may render *two very thankful and happy!* Believe me, it is with the utmost truth I assure you, that, in securing a decent and comfortable independence for our beloved Cowper, you will confer the highest pleasure and obligation upon

Your lordship's sincere and respectful,
though importunate servant,
W. HAYLEY.

It could have been no disappointment to Cowper that Hayley did not succeed in bringing about a meeting which would have been far more painful than pleasurable to both parties. Thurlow was no longer the Thurlow who had been his daily companion and bosom-friend during some of the blithest years of life; and Cowper no longer the Cowper with whom his fellow-clerk used to pass those hours in mirthful or in thoughtful conversation which ought to have been employed in engrossing; and to "giggle and make giggle" at Ashley Cowper's always hospitable house. The one had felt Adversity's "iron scourge," and the World had set its iron stamp on the other's stronger and coarser mould. Each, too, had something to forgive in himself, the consciousness whereof could not but have produced an uneasy feeling; Thurlow, that he had failed at one time in that courtesy to an old and unfortunate friend, which in his case would have been kindness; and Cowper, that he had given vent to his resentment in bitter strains, which, though unpublished, had not been kept secret from some of his correspondents. Indeed, except in Lady Hesketh's case, Cowper seems rather to have shunned than desired a meeting with any of those persons who had been his first and most intimate associates, and to whom in some woful respects he must have appeared "so fallen, so changed!" Formidable as the journey from the northern extremity of Buckinghamshire to the shores of Sussex appeared to him, he dreaded nothing so much as an interview with General Cowper on the way,—which yet, having been desired by the General, he could

not decline. He had not seen him for thirty years, "and but for this journey," he says, "should never have seen him again." It was not that his love for those friends was diminished, but because he could not bear to have one part of his life brought too strongly to his recollection.

Rose walked from London to meet the travellers at Barnet, where they slept the first night. At Kingston, where they dined the next day, they found the General; and late on the third evening, "after three days' confinement in a coach, and suffering as they went," he says, "all that could be suffered from excessive heat and dust," they arrived at Hayley's door. The first letter which he wrote after his arrival appears to have been — to Mr. Samuel Teedon of Olney!

DEAR SIR,

Eartham, near Chichester, Aug. 5, 1792.

This journey, of which we all had some fears, and I a thousand, has by the mercy of God been happily and well performed, and we have met with no terrors by the way. I indeed myself was a little daunted by the tremendous height of the Sussex hills, in comparison of which all that I had seen elsewhere are dwarfs; but I only was alarmed; Mrs. Unwin had no such sensations, but was always cheerful from the beginning of our expedition to the end of it. At Barnet we found the inn so noisy that I was almost driven to despair by the dread that she would get no rest; but I was happily disappointed. She slept about four hours, and seemed as much refreshed as if she had slept twice as many. At Ripley we had a silent inn, and rested well. The next day, but late, we arrived at Eartham; and now begin to feel ourselves, under the hospitable roof of our amiable friend, well requited for all the fatigue, the heat, and the clouds of dust that we endured in the journey.

I had one glimpse — at least I was willing to hope it was a glimpse — of heavenly light by the way; an answer, I suppose, to many fervent prayers of yours. Continue to pray for us, and when any thing occurs worth communicating let us know it.

Mrs. Unwin is in charming spirits, to which the incomparable air and delightful scenes of Eartham have much

contributed. But our thanks are always due to the Giver of all good for these and all his benefits; for without His blessing Paradise itself would not cheer the soul that knows him.

Adieu. I am yours with many thanks for all your spiritual aids.

WM. COWPER.

Mrs. Unwin sends her kind remembrances.

"Here we are," says Cowper,²⁸ "in the most elegant mansion that I have ever inhabited, and surrounded by the most delightful pleasure-grounds that I have ever seen; but which, dissipated as my powers of thought are at present, I will not undertake to describe. It shall suffice me to say, that they occupy three sides of a hill, which, in Buckinghamshire, might well pass for a mountain, and from the summit of which is beheld a most magnificent landscape, bounded by the sea, and, on one part, by the Isle of Wight, which may also be seen plainly from the window of the library in which I am writing." — "The inland scene is equally beautiful, consisting of a large and deep valley, well cultivated, and enclosed by magnificent hills, all crowned with wood. I had, for my part, no conception that a poet could be the owner of such a Paradise."²⁹ — "Here we are, as happy as it is in the power of terrestrial good to make us,—and our reception has been the kindest that it was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive."³⁰

Hayley was not the only person who welcomed them to Sussex as his friends;—there was another face that brightened with joy at their arrival. The reader will remember that when he inquired for an electrical machine, in the hope of its producing a beneficial effect upon Mrs. Unwin, immediately after her paralytic stroke, one had to his great surprise been found in the village. The owner, Mr. Sockett, who had partly constructed it himself, and whom Cowper described as a very worthy, intelligent, but unfortunate

²⁸ To Mr. Greathead, Aug. 6. ²⁹ To Mrs. Courtenay, Aug. 12.

³⁰ To Mr. Greathead.

man, of the gentlest manners, was then absent on a distant journey of unsuccessful business ; his son, a youth of about fifteen, brought the machine to Weston Lodge, and came every day to assist in using it. Hayley was interested by all he saw and all that he heard of his young assistant, the more, perhaps, because Thomas Sockett had, like himself, been afflicted with much illness in his childhood ; and when the youth, who wrote an excellent hand, and was a good arithmetician, wishing to be no longer a burden to his parents, asked if he could recommend him to any situation as a clerk in London, it occurred to him that young Sockett might be very useful in teaching his own son what he was capable of teaching well, and might acquire more Latin and some Greek from his disciple : he had just before bought a Latin grammar with the little pocket money that he had saved for that purpose. Cowper, agreeing as he did with his new friend upon the advantages of private education, thought the plan likely to be advantageous for both boys, and Hayley, when he departed from Weston, took Sockett with him. Thomas Hayley was well pleased with a companion who, acting towards him in the double capacity of preceptor and pupil, was only three years his senior ; they became good friends, and when Cowper arrived at Eartham, he and Mrs. Unwin were delighted to find that the plan was succeeding to the satisfaction of all parties. The two boys endeared themselves to him by their attention to Mrs. Unwin ; and she called them her pair of young griffins, because they used every day to draw her round the hill in a four-wheeled garden-chair.

Change of air and of circumstances seemed to benefit both the travellers. "I indeed," says Cowper,³¹ "was in tolerable health before I set out, but have acquired, since I came, both a better appetite and a knack of sleeping almost as much in a single night as formerly in two. Whether double quantities of that article will be favorable to me as a poet, time must show. About myself, however, I care little, being made of materials so tough as not to threaten

³¹ To Mrs. Courtenay, Aug. 25.

me even now, at the end of so many *lustrums*, with any thing like a speedy dissolution. My chief concern has been about Mrs. Unwin; and my chief comfort at this moment is that she likewise has received, I hope, considerable benefit by the journey." He complained, however, that being in a new scene, and surrounded by strange objects, he found his powers of thinking dissipated to a degree that rendered it difficult for him even to write a letter, and made him as awkward at verse as if he had never dealt in it. "I am in truth," said he,³² "so unaccountably local in the use of my pen, that, like the man in the fable who could leap well no where but at Rhodes, I seem incapable of writing at all except at Weston."

Yet his time at Eartham was far from being idly spent. Hayley imparted to him his life of Milton, as far as he had then proceeded with it; and Cowper, who had completed his translations of Milton's Latin and Italian poems, revised them carefully with Hayley,³³ comparing the version with the original. They made also a rapid yet metrical translation of Andreini's *Adamo*, an Italian drama, which Hayley supposed to have had some influence in directing Milton's attention to the great subject of *Paradise Lost*. Hayley says that this afforded them a pleasant relaxation after their more serious morning studies, and that Johnny of Norfolk "acted as secretary, and committed the composition to paper as it proceeded from the lips of the two social translators."

Among the persons whom Hayley invited to meet his honored guest were Romney and Charlotte Smith. The latter "exerted her talents," says Hayley, "most agreeably to excite his wonder and conciliate his esteem; for happening to have begun one of her novels, the *Old Manor House*, she devoted the early part of the day to composition in her own apartment; and entertained the little party at Eartham by reading to them in the evening what-

³² To Lady Hesketh, Sept. 9.

³³ "Let me," says Hayley, "here remark, to the honor of Cowper, that with all his poetic powers, he was ever willing to receive and to avail himself of friendly criticism, with a spirit equally modest and grateful." — *Cowper's Milton*, vol. iv. Appendix, p. 385.

ever the fertility of her fancy had produced in the course of a long, studious morning. This lady had a quickness of invention and a rapidity of hand which astonished every witness of her abilities. Cowper repeatedly declared that he knew no man among his early associates, some of whom piqued themselves on rapid composition, who could have composed so rapidly and so well." The Old Manor House is the best of her novels; and Hayley says, "It was delightful to hear her read what she had just written; for she read, as she wrote, with simplicity and grace."³⁴

Romney, who had long been one of Hayley's most intimate friends, was then at the height of his reputation, and, though in the decline of life, in full possession of those powers which, many years before, had made him an object of jealousy to Sir Joshua himself. In those days Thurlow had said, "There are two factions in art, and I am of the Romney faction."³⁵ Time has reversed the chancellor's decision, and yet Romney remains a great name, and will continue so. Fuseli, indeed, said of him, that he was made for the times, and the times for him;—but Romney's sketches in the Fitzwilliam Museum are worth more than all Fuseli's finished works. "According to the maxim," says Flaxman, "that every painter paints himself, each picture presents, in some measure, a transcript of its author's merits and defects." According to that inference, there is no painter of whom a more unfavorable opinion would be formed from his works than Fuseli. If he looked at other things as he looked at the human form, he could have seen nothing but what was distorted by his manner of beholding it.

That maxim Flaxman thus applies to Romney, whom

³⁴ Life of Romney, p. 180.

³⁵ "This careless expression was bandied about to the sore annoyance of Reynolds. Nay, so precarious is fame, that for several years Romney had manifestly the ascendancy in the scale of popular opinion; and the President had to soothe himself with the belief that the day would come when men's eyes would be opened, and the grave and quiet grandeur of his works would triumph. In those times of bitterness and feud, when Sir Joshua, in the course of conversation, was compelled to speak of his rival, he merely indicated him by saying, 'The man in Cavendish Square.'" — *Allan Cunningham's Lives of the Painters*, vol. v. p. 96.

he knew and loved. "The judicious eye will easily discern whether the work was produced with sensibility or want of feeling; the choice and treatment of the subject will discover whether his mind was elevated or low, as the detail of parts will explain in what branches of knowledge he was skilled or deficient, to what extent he had chosen and analyzed the beauties of nature, and, finally, whether the work was accomplished by painful, patient labor, or flowed with ease and rapidity which increased the delight and exultation of the progress. These characteristics may be as easily traced in the works of Romney as in those of any artist that ever existed. Modest in his opinion of his own talents, he practised no tricks or deception to obtain popularity; but as he loved his art fervently, he practised it honestly, with indefatigable study and application. When he first began to paint, he had seen no gallery of pictures, nor the fine productions of ancient sculpture; but men, women, and children, were his statues, and all objects under the cope of heaven formed his school of painting. The rainbow, the purple distance, or the silver lake, taught him coloring; the various actions and passions of the human figure, with the forms of clouds, woods, mountains, or valleys, afforded him studies of composition. Indeed, his genius bore a strong resemblance to the scenes he was born in; like them it partook of the grand and beautiful; and like them also, the bright sunshine and enchanting prospects of his fancy were occasionally overspread with mist and gloom."

Sir Joshua died a few months before Romney and Cowper met at Eartham. He is said to have declared it to be impossible for two painters in the same department of the art to continue in friendship with each other; and it is supposed to have been owing to him³⁶ that Romney was never elected even an associate of the Royal Academy. But if

³⁶ "Reynolds, it would seem, disliked both the man and his works; and such was the omnipotence of the President, that on whomsoever his evil eye lighted, that person had small chance for the honors of the Academy;—it is well known that the President, and all who loved to be with him, had no good will to Romney."—*Allan Cunningham*, vol. v. p. 77.

Romney was ever conscious of regarding him as a rival, that feeling assuredly never amounted to ill-will, nor tempted him to injustice. On the contrary, he bore a fair and manly testimony to Sir Joshua's genius. Upon Hayley's telling him that a whole length of Mrs. Siddons which he had begun was thought superior to Sir Joshua's well-known portrait of her as the Tragic Muse, he replied, "The people know nothing of the matter, for it is not." And when some of his friends were delivering their opinions upon the Infant Hercules,— "Gentlemen," said he, "I have listened to all you have said; some observations are true, and some are nonsense;—but no other man in Europe could paint such a picture." Romney, indeed, was as generous in rendering justice to his contemporaries as he was in giving to young artists such encouragement as he had stood in need of himself, when he commenced his career under difficulties which few men would have braved, and fewer still could have overcome.

His countenance was intellectual, with strong marks of feeling, and a cast of melancholy. His eyes were large, quick, and significant. At the sight of distress, or at a pathetic tale, his lip would quiver. He was indeed sensitive to excess. When in company with his intimate friends, he spoke concerning his art; Cumberland says it was with a sublimity of idea, and a peculiarity of expressive language that was entirely his own. On that subject he frequently moved himself to tears,—to which he is said to have been constitutionally prone. He had indeed a high sense of the dignity of his art. A lady once observed at Earham, that though emulation often produced evil among artists, it appeared necessary for calling forth their talents; and if it were not for that spirit, there seemed nothing left to animate the genius of a painter. "Yes, madam, there is," said Romney, "and a more powerful incentive to laudable exertion." He waited for the question, "Pray, sir, what is it?" and replied, "Religion." Hayley affirms that he often painted under the influence of that feeling,— "that he frequently considered the act of painting as an act of devotion, in which he was expressing his gratitude to Heaven for such talents as were given him, by his solicitude

to exert them in a manner that might conduce to the great interests of mankind."

Their host at Eartham was not disappointed in his expectations, that, with so many points of approximation between them, Cowper and Romney would take to each other. But there was also a latent cause which increased the painter's sympathy towards the poet. Romney was not unacquainted with Cowper's state of mind; it had been made known to him, no doubt, as far as Hayley himself knew it at that time; perhaps he had that sad presentiment which we know by Swift's instance is sometimes felt, that he himself might one day be visited by a similar affliction; — and he too had a worm at the core.

Thirty years before, Romney had left a wife and two children at Kendal, to seek his fortune in London. Born in humble life, and bred to his father's trade of carpenter joiner and cabinet-maker, he had apprenticed himself at the age of nineteen to a portrait-painter in Kendal, at twenty-two had married a young woman in his own rank of life, of respectable connections, and carefully brought up; and at twenty-seven he took leave of her with her own concurrence for this adventure, — but with no apprehension on her part that he went with no intention of returning, and it may be hoped with no such intention on his. This, indeed, might be believed, if Hayley, who had particular reasons for being what in the days of the Commonwealth was called a Miltonist, had not, as far as his authority avails, fixed upon his friend the stain of having chosen thus to divorce himself, and deliberately sacrificed his duty to his ambition. Let us hope that the "frailties" which have thus been "drawn from their dread abode," were repented by the one party as sincerely as we know they were forgiven by the other!

By his industry, and his wife's excellent economy, he had accumulated one hundred pounds, seventy of which he left with her, and with the rest set out for the metropolis. As a temporary provision for one of her station, and at that time, this was not inconsiderable; nor did he ever fail to provide for her and her children. But from the hour of his departure till his meeting with Cowper, he had

never beheld the wife of his youth ; nor did he behold her till seven years more had elapsed, when, after seven-and-thirty years of desertion, he returned to Kendal an old man, famous, indeed, and rich, but broken in health and spirits, and, perhaps, at heart, to be nursed³⁷ by her during eighteen months of bodily decay, and two years more of mental imbecility.³⁸ Alas, how little reliance can be placed upon kind hearts, quick sensibilities, and even devotional feelings, if there is no religious principle to control, and direct, and strengthen them!

Hayley says that the genius, the benevolence, and the misfortunes of Cowper, gave such a peculiar sweetness and sanctity to his character, as rendered his society in the highest degree delightful, both to Romney and himself. It could not indeed be otherwise to men who were so well qualified to appreciate it ; but Romney, who was then on the threshold of old age, had in the secret grief which he could not but feel whenever he remembered the past, or looked on to the future, a sense of silent sympathy with one whom he knew to be stricken at heart. He was "eager," says their host,³⁹ "to execute a portrait of a person so memorable ; and in drawing it he was peculiarly desirous of making the nearest approach to life that he possibly could. For this purpose he chose to make use of colored crayons, a mode of painting in which he had indeed little experience ; but he possessed that happy versatility of talent, which gave him an appearance of

³⁷ "He had the comfort," says Hayley, "of finding an attentive, affectionate nurse in a most exemplary wife, who had never been irritated to an act of unkindness, or an expression of reproach, by his years of absence and neglect."

³⁸ "In the last letter which Hayley received from him, he said that the post had just brought him good tidings of his brother, Colonel Romney, who, he hoped, was then on his way home from the East Indies. The colonel arrived, hastened to Kendal just in time—not indeed to witness his death, but to see the last spark of intellect extinguished. 'Brother,' he said, 'do you not know me?' Romney looked eagerly in his face, burst into an agony of tears, half articulated some words of recognition, and then forgetting him, and every one else that loved him, sunk into a state of helpless imbecility."—*Allan Cunningham*, p. 132.

³⁹ *Life of Romney*, p. 177.

having been long familiar with any process of art that he had an inclination to try. He worked with uncommon diligence, zeal, and success, producing a resemblance so powerful, that spectators, who contemplated the portrait with the original by its side, thought it hardly possible for any similitude to be more striking, or more exact."

Cowper confirms Hayley's assertion, that in the opinion of all at Eartham, Romney had drawn this likeness "with his best hand," and that it was "the most exact resemblance possible." Thus his portrait, for which he had never sat before, was taken twice in the course of two months; and in both cases it appears to his own entire satisfaction, and to that of the artist, and of the beholders. There is a great and reasonable pleasure in beholding the well-authenticated likeness of one who, by his actions or his writings, has rendered himself a worthy object of our admiration, and the pleasure is enhanced if that sentiment be combined with a sense of gratitude and of love. It is, therefore, curiously fortunate that we should possess two portraits of Cowper, at the same age, both so certainly and strongly resembling him, and yet so different from each other, that to acquire a good knowledge of his countenance it is necessary to see them both.

Fuseli, who disparaged every thing which he did not like, and whose speech generally savored of verjuice and wormwood, used to call Romney a coat and waistcoat painter. But in this case Abbot's was more the matter-of-fact picture; it has not only the coat and waistcoat displayed, but also that other article of male dress from which one translation of the Bible has received the unbecoming name whereby it is commonly known. It represents moreover his periwig, probably the identical one concerning which he wrote, two years before, to Mrs. Frog,⁴⁰ saying, "My periwig is arrived, and is the very perfection of all periwigs, having only one fault; which is, that my head will only go into the first half of it, the other half, or the upper part of it, continuing still unoccupied. My artist in this way at Olney has, however, undertaken to make the whole of it tenantable, and then I shall be twenty years

⁴⁰ March 21, 1790.

younger than you have ever seen me." Ought not the writer then to have his portrait taken in the periwig which he had thus described? And if this were not the very periwig (which yet it probably was) it was at least one of the same kind, for the fashion of such things did not change greatly in the course of two years; nor, if it had, was Cowper either at an age, or in a way of life, to alter his costume with it. Here, therefore, we have Cowper in the complete dress of that day. He is represented, pen in hand, with a large book lying open before him, on his desk,—that desk, Theodora's gift, which he so pleasantly described on its arrival at Olney, and which, by that description, has been rendered of all desks the most memorable. It is a front face, and the painter has not aimed at any thing more than an expression of placid thoughtfulness. The countenance is mild, pleasing, and intelligent; it would not be pronounced melancholy if it were not known to be Cowper's; and certainly there is no trace in it of any darker state of mind.

Romney's is a more ambitious portrait. "He wished," says Hayley, "to express what he often saw in studying the features of Cowper,—

The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling;

and I think he expressed it without overstepping the modesty of truth and nature; but some persons, and ladies in particular, more conversant with the colloquial than with the poetic countenance of Cowper, have supposed Romney's portrait of him to border on extravagance of expression. Painters are said to infuse into all their portraits some portion of themselves; and it is possible that Romney may have superadded a little of his own wildness and fire to the native enthusiasm of the poet whom he so zealously portrayed." "Yet," Hayley adds, "after scrutinizing it for many years, with eyes as impartial as friendship may pretend to, I regard the portrait in question as one of the most masterly and most faithful resemblances that I ever beheld. Indeed it was painted literally *con amore*, (to use the technical expression applied to the happiest works of art;) for

Romney had conceived a most sincere affection for his new acquaintance."⁴¹

The painter himself, we are told, considered this portrait "as the nearest approach that he had ever made to a perfect representation of life and character."⁴² Cowper expressed his opinion of it in a complimentary sonnet⁴³ to the painter.

Romney! expert infallibly to trace,
On chart or canvass, not the form alone
And semblance, but, however faintly shown,
The mind's impression too on every face,
With strokes that time ought never to erase:
Thou hast so pencilled mine, that, though I own
The subject worthless, I have never known
The artist shining with superior grace.
But this I mark, that symptoms none of woe
In thy incomparable work appear:
Well! I am satisfied, it should be so,
Since on maturer thought, the cause is clear;
For in my looks what sorrow couldst thou see,
When I was Hayley's guest, and sat to thee?

It was likely enough that Cowper would perceive no vestige of melancholy in this portrait, the expression being nothing more than what he was accustomed to see every morning when he looked in the glass; but it seems strange that Hayley and Romney could mistake for the light of genius what Mr. Leigh Hunt has truly and forcibly described as "a fire fiercer than that either of intellect or fancy, gleaming from the raised and protruded eye." It was no ideal frenzy which had given it a character so decided, and so strongly marked, that perhaps there is no other portrait, taken from a living subject, which it is so painful to contemplate. And yet this renders it the more valuable, because it is a sure test of its truth.

At Earham, Cowper met also his disciple Hurdis,—

⁴¹ Life of Romney, p. 178.

⁴² Ibid. p. 181.

⁴³ Cowper says, "I intended nothing less than a sonnet when I began. I know not why, but I said to myself, It shall not be a sonnet. Accordingly I attempted it in one sort of measure, then in a second, then in a third, till I had made the trial in half a dozen different kinds of shorter verse; and behold it is a sonnet at last! The fates would have it so."—To Hayley, Oct. 28, 1792.

like Romney, for the first and only time. He had recently lost a favorite sister; and Cowper was requested by Hayley to send him as pressing an invitation as he could frame. "I have every motive," said he,⁴⁴ "to wish your consent. Both your benefit and my own, which I believe would be abundantly answered by your coming, ought to make me eloquent in such a cause. Here you would find silence and retirement in perfection, when you would seek them; and here such company as I have no doubt would suit you; all cheerful, but not noisy; and all alike disposed to love you. You and I seem to have a fair opportunity of meeting: it were a pity we should be in the same county, and not come together. I am here till the seventeenth of September—an interval that will afford you time to make the necessary arrangements, and to gratify me at last with an interview which I have long desired. Let me hear from you soon, that I may have double pleasure—the pleasure of expecting, as well as that of seeing you."

Hurdis accordingly came. "You would admire him much," said Cowper to Lady Hesketh.⁴⁵ "He is gentle in his manners, and delicate in his person, resembling our poor friend Unwin, both in face and figure, more than any one I have seen. But he has not—at least he has not at present—his vivacity."

Six weeks, to which his visit at Eartham extended, Cowper thought "a holiday time long enough for a man who had much to do,"—though what he had to do with Milton might have been done with more advantage in Hayley's library than in his own. But the beneficial effects of change were beginning to fail. "I am, without the least dissimulation," he says to Lady Hesketh, "in good health; my spirits are about as good as you have ever seen them; and if increase of appetite, and a double portion of sleep, be advantageous, such are the advantages that I have received from this migration. As to that gloominess of mind which I have had these twenty years, it cleaves to me even here; and could I be translated to Paradise, unless I left my body behind me, would cleave to me even there also. It is my companion for life, and nothing will ever divorce us. So

⁴⁴ Aug. 26.

⁴⁵ Sept. 9.

much for myself. Mrs. Unwin is evidently better for her jaunt, though by no means as she was before this last attack; still wanting help when she would rise from her seat, and a support in walking; but she is able to use more exercise than she could at home, and moves with rather a less tottering step. God knows what he designs for me; but when I see those who are dearer to me than myself, disordered and enfeebled, and myself as strong as in the days of my youth, I tremble for the solitude in which a few years will place me. I wish her and you to die before me, but not till I am more likely to follow immediately."

Laudanum, he tells her, was required for the "little nervous fever to which he was always subject," and for which he found it the best remedy. The scenery itself began to oppress him; "more beautiful," said he,⁴⁶ "I have never beheld, nor expect to behold; but the charms of it, uncommon as they are, have not in the least alienated my affections from Weston. The genius of that place suits me better; it has an air of snug concealment, in which a disposition like mine feels peculiarly gratified; whereas, here, I see, from every window, woods like forests, and hills like mountains,—a wildness, in short, that rather increases my natural melancholy, and which, were it not for the agreeables I find within, would soon convince me that mere change of place can avail me little. Accordingly, I have not looked out for a house in Sussex, nor shall."

In a letter of the preceding year, to Mr. Newton,⁴⁷ he had said, "I would that I could see some of the mountains that you have seen; especially because Dr. Johnson has pronounced that no man is qualified to be a poet who has never seen a mountain. But mountains I shall never see, unless, perhaps, in a dream, or unless there are such in heaven; nor those, unless I receive twice as much mercy as ever yet was shown to any man." When Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were about to remove from Huntingdon, and the land "was all before them where to choose," Helmsley, in the North Riding of Yorkshire, was one of the places where they thought of setting up their rest. If that place had been fixed on, Cowper would have been near

⁴⁶ To Lady Hesketh, Sept. 9.

⁴⁷ Nov. 16, 1791.

the finest ruins in England, and within easy reach of the grandest descent from the highlands to a plain country. But, however the course of his life might have been affected in other points, if he had settled there, instead of at Olney, he could not have been better placed than where he was, for the development of his peculiar genius. "Cowper," says Sir James Mackintosh, "does not describe the most beautiful scenes in nature; he discovers what is most beautiful in ordinary scenes. In fact, Cowper saw very few beautiful scenes; but his poetical eye, and his moral heart, detected beauty in the sandy flats of Buckinghamshire."⁴⁸ The Task could not have been a more delightful poem than it is, and no other scenery could have suited its character so well, as none could have been more entirely in accord with the disposition of the poet. He missed, at Eartham, the repose, the shelter, and the seclusion which he felt at Weston.

As the time for their departure drew nigh, his fears on Mrs. Unwin's account began again to trouble him; "but they are not now," said he,⁴⁹ "quite so reasonable as in the first instance. If she could bear the fatigue of travelling then, she is more equal to it at present; and, supposing that nothing happens to alarm her, which is very probable, may be expected to reach Weston in much better condition than when she left it. Her improvement, however, is chiefly in her looks, and in the articles of speaking and walking; for she can neither rise from her chair without help; nor walk without a support; nor read, nor use her needles." She was indeed still so feeble as to keep him in a state of continual apprehension. "I live," said he,⁵⁰ "under the point of a sword suspended by a hair."

There were other things which disturbed him when he thought of his approaching journey. It had been arranged that he should dine with General Cowper on the way. "The pleasure I shall have in the interview," said he,⁵¹ "will hardly be greater than the pain I shall feel at the

⁴⁸ Life of Sir James Mackintosh, vol. ii. p. 104.

⁴⁹ To Mrs. Courtenay, Sept. 10.

⁵⁰ To Charlotte Smith, Sept.

⁵¹ To Lady Hesketh, Sept. 9.

end of it ; for we shall part probably to meet no more." He had also engaged to pass through London, and breakfast with Rose at his house in Chancery Lane. That he, who had never been in London, since he was taken from thence to St. Alban's, should have chosen now to pass through it, at the risk of freshening the most painful recollections of his life, seems most remarkable.

Hayley himself perceived that his friend began to feel the "attraction of home," and that Mrs. Unwin's infirm state, and the declining season of the year, rendered it highly necessary for them to reach their own fireside by the time they had proposed. "Their departure," he says, "was a scene of affectionate anxiety, and a perfect contrast to the gayety of their arrival at Earham." Cowper wrote a few lines to him the same day, from Kingston. "I left you," said he, "with a heavy heart, and with a heavy heart took leave of our dear Tom at the bottom of the chalk-hill. But soon after this last separation, my troubles gushed from my eyes, and then I was better. — We must now prepare for our visit to the General. I add no more, therefore, than our dearest remembrance, and prayers that God may bless you and yours, and reward you a hundred fold for all your kindness. Tell Tom I shall always hold him dear for his affectionate attentions to Mrs. Unwin. From her heart the memory of him can never be erased."

What he felt upon this visit to the General he described thus to Hayley : — "I am inclined to think you will agree with me, that there is sometimes more true heroism passing in a corner, and on occasions that make no noise in the world, than has often been exercised by those whom that world esteems her greatest heroes, and on occasions the most illustrious : I hope so at least ; for all the heroism I have to boast, and all the opportunities I have of displaying any, are of a private nature. After writing the note, I immediately began to prepare for my appointed visit to Ham ; but the struggles that I had with my own spirit, laboring as I did under the most dreadful dejection, are never to be told. I would have given the world to have been excused. I went, however, and carried my point against myself with a heart riven asunder—I have reasons

re." for all this anxiety, which I cannot relate now. The visit, however, passed off well, and we returned in the dark to Kingston; I, with a lighter heart than I had known since my departure from Eartham, and Mary, too, for she had suffered hardly less than myself, and chiefly on my account. That night we rested well at our inn, and at twenty minutes after eight next morning set off for London; exactly at ten we reached Mr. Rose's door."

Mr. Rose was acquainted with the Welsh bard, Edward Williams, who at that time worked at his trade, as a mason, in London. He had told Cowper of his singular character, his talent for verse, and his extraordinary knowledge of Welsh antiquities and bardic traditions. Cowper had been much interested by the account, and Williams, therefore, was invited to meet him at breakfast. But Cowper's spirits, as might have been expected, failed when he felt himself in London; he sat at the corner of the fireplace in total silence, and manifested no other interest in the conversation than occasionally raising his eyes toward the speaker. Williams was struck by the quiet melancholy of his aspect; he himself, however, was led to converse upon Welsh literature and the bardic institutions — a subject with which no man was better acquainted, and few so well; and he was told afterwards that Cowper had been a pleased and attentive listener, though in too nervous a state to bear an introduction, or to converse.⁵²

After breakfast they proceeded to St. Alban's; so far Rose accompanied them. "In the dark, and in a storm, at eight at night, they found themselves at their own back door."

⁵² This is stated in some Recollections of the Welsh Bard, by Mr. Waring, published in a series of letters in the *Cambrian Newspaper*, 1827. Williams's memory had deceived him, both as to the year and time of the day; — for he spoke of it as an evening party, and as having been after the publication of his poems, — which were not published till 1794. Such mistakes are easy, after a lapse of many years; but of the meeting there can be no doubt; and if Cowper had been in his better mood, there were few men to whom he would have listened with more pleasure than to my old acquaintance, nor from whom he could have received information which would have interested him so much. It grieves me to think what curious knowledge, and how much of it, has probably perished with poor old Edward Williams!

CHAPTER XVII.

COWPER AT WESTON. INCREASE OF HIS MALADY. HAYLEY'S
SECOND VISIT.

IN the letter which informed Hayley of their safe return, Cowper said that "Chaos himself, even the Chaos of Milton, was not surrounded with more confusion, nor had a mind more completely in a hubbub than his own at that time. At our first arrival," said he,¹ "after long absence, we found a hundred orders to servants necessary, a thousand things to be restored to their proper places, and an endless variety of *minutiæ* to be adjusted, which, though individually of little importance, are most momentous in the aggregate." This was written on the second day after his arrival, and on the third he wrote to Teedon, apologizing for having left him so long without a written notice of their return. "Mrs. Unwin," said he, "still wants much of restoration, and there is still much in that particular to be prayed for. As to myself, my frame of mind continues such as it was before I went to Eartham, almost always low, and often inexpressibly dejected. My work is still in suspense, or, to say truth, not yet begun; nor do I at present see that I am likely to have any leisure for such labors. But on this latter I do not ask you to pray, because you have already obtained sufficient assurances concerning it. God can enable me to do much in a short time; and that is the only hope I have of ever performing it at all."

Cowper had written from Eartham to tell Johnson that he had hopes of carrying Mrs. Unwin back in such a state of health as would consist with a little more diligence and constancy, on his part, in the work which he had undertaken. "I thank you," said he,² "for setting my heart at rest from the disquietude I felt, when I wrote last, on the score of time, lest I should not be ready at the moment. I

¹ Sept. 21.

² Aug. 21.

long, nevertheless, to be making a progress, and shall not allow myself to loiter merely because I am not pressed. In truth, I have no wish at present more sincere, or ardent, than to finish my Miltonic labors, that I may find myself at full leisure for poetry ; having learned by experience, that to divide my attention between two objects is to give neither of them a sufficient share of it." The engagement began to fret his spirits after his return, when, having none to relieve him, he found how much Mrs. Unwin needed his attention.

A week after his first note to Teedon, he says to him,³ " Since I wrote last, I have been completely deprived of all the little encouragement to my work that I could gather both from your notices and my own. Other encouragement I have received, but, while Mrs. Unwin continues weak as she is, am little the better for any. Uninterrupted leisure is necessary to such studies, and such leisure is to me impossible. If God has spoken, it will be done. The event will soon show, for the time grows short, and makes it necessary to decide."

The Olney schoolmaster may have been an enthusiast, and have supposed that he actually received from Heaven the intimations which he was presumptuous enough to seek, (for if the heart is deceitful, the imagination is not less so ;) or he may have deemed it allowable, and even meritorious, to employ pious fraud for the purpose of encouraging one who stood so lamentably in need of comfort ; and consistently with either case, he may have been more or less influenced by the pleasure and advantage which resulted from making himself a person of some consequence to " the Squire," — Sir Cowper seems to have lost his title after his removal to Weston. There had been a time when, owing to Mrs. Unwin's discretion, Cowper was never mentioned in Olney but with the highest respect ;⁴ but after her faculties began to fail, there were some who played upon him, and some who preyed upon him, and some who spread tales of him as disparaging as they were false.⁵

³ Sept. 29.

⁴ Early Productions, p. 63.

⁵ Such was a story that he had planned an elopement with Lady Austen, and that the carriage in which they were to have gone off

Vain as the schoolmaster was, he appears to have kept the secret of his mysterious communications with a degree of prudence which is not often found in connection with so much egregious conceit. He submitted to Cowper, at this time, an attack of his own upon Peter Pindar, for his poem on the King's visit to Whitbread's brewery. Cowper, who was perfectly master of himself upon all subjects but one, replied that it had amused him as much as he was capable of being amused at the time he read it; but he added, "I should not suppose Mr. Whitbread a likely man to interest himself at all on such a subject, or that it would be worth your while to present your verses to him." Such was this poor man's vanity, that he offered his services to vindicate Cowper's Homer against the reviewers. The offer was thus courteously declined — "As to the reviewers, I determined before I published that whatever treatment I might receive from them, I would never touch the pen in my own vindication; and am equally resolved that no friend of mine shall ever do it with my consent. They have belied me. The learned will know that they have; but to convince the unlearned of it would be impossible. Therefore let them rest." Yet while he thus dexterously answered a man whom he knew to be in this matter as ignorant and incompetent as he was conceited, he nevertheless consulted him as a person who received communications from above.

He had now fixed a time for setting doggedly to his work, but neither this resolution nor Teedon's encouragement availed. "Yesterday," said he to Hayley,⁶ "was a day of assignation with myself, — the day of which I said, some days before it came, 'When that day comes, I will begin my dissertations.' Accordingly, when it came, I prepared to do so; filled a letter-case with fresh paper, furnished myself with a pretty good pen, and replenished my ink-bottle; but partly from one cause, and partly from another, chiefly, how-

was waiting in an adjoining lane, when Mrs. Unwin discovered the design in time to prevent it.

There was a farmer's daughter, of some prettiness and more pertness, who was sometimes asked to dinner at the Lodge, and she and her family spread reports all over the country, that Mr. Cowper had offered her marriage.

⁶ Oct. 2.

ever, from distress and dejection, after writing and obliterating about six lines, in the composition of which I spent near an hour, I was obliged to relinquish the attempt. An attempt so unsuccessful could have no other effect than to dishearten me ; and it has had that effect to such a degree, that I know not when I shall find courage to make another. At present I shall certainly abstain, since at present I cannot well afford to expose myself to the danger of a fresh mortification." This failure of his own power he imputed in some degree to the weather, and the season. "A bad night," said he, "succeeded by an east wind, and a sky all in sables, have such an effect on my spirits, that if I did not consult my own comfort more than yours, I should not write to-day. In truth, one day excepted, I have not seen the day when I have been cheerful since I left you. My spirits, I think, are almost constantly lower than they were. The approach of winter is perhaps the cause ; and if it is, I have nothing better to expect for a long time to come."

But another cause was stated to Teedon.⁷ "I sat down to my work on Monday, with a fixed purpose to begin ; determined, too, not to relinquish it for any slight impediments that might present themselves. But it was in vain. Perpetual and unavoidable interruptions were partly the reason, but much more an absolute inability. My spirits are not good enough, nor my mind collected enough, for composition of any kind. How should they be so ? when I never wake without words that are a poniard in my bosom, and the pain of which I feel all the day, Mrs. Unwin's approaching and sudden death the constant subject of them ! In vain I pray to be delivered from these distressing experiences ; they are only multiplied upon me the more, and the more pointed.

"I feel myself, in short, the most unpitied, the most unprotected, and the most unacknowledged outcast of the human race.

"You now know how it is with me. When it is better you shall know that too ; but I expect nothing, or nothing but misery.

⁷ Oct. 3.

"Mrs. Unwin is at present as well as usual : perhaps she is even a little better ; but the nature of her disorder is such that it keeps me in continual fear. In one moment all may be undone again, and I left desolate."

In his next communication he says,⁸ "Dear sir, I write to you from the same deeps as before, but rather less sensible of being there. Nothing, I mean, has occurred in the course of my experience⁹ that has had the least tendency to alter my feelings for the better ; but I have lately put myself into a course of bark, as I always do at this season of the year, and generally find some little benefit from it. Time and the pen have been my only remedies for the deepest wounds that ever soul received, these many years ; and the pen is now forbidden me ; or, which is the same thing, I am providentially precluded from the use of it.

"Mrs. Unwin, I thank God, continues as well as she was, but still her feebleness is a great distress to us both. I do not find that your prayers for her recovery obtain any encouraging answer."

Upon Hayley's sending him some verses at this time, which he praised as being "sweet as the honey that they accompanied," he said,¹⁰ "when shall I be able to do the like ? Perhaps when my Mary, like your Tom, shall cease to be an invalid, I may recover a power at least to do something.—I began a letter to you yesterday, my dearest brother, and proceeded through two sides of the sheet ; but so much of my nervous fever found its way into it, that looking it over this morning, I determined not to send it. I have risen, though not in good spirits, yet in better than I generally do of late, and therefore will not address you in the melancholy tone that belongs to my worst feelings.—Your wishes to disperse my melancholy would, I am sure, prevail, did that event depend on the warmth and sincerity with which you frame them ; but it has baffled both wishes and prayers, and those the most fervent that could be made, so many years, that the case seems hopeless."

Three days after the date of this letter to Hayley, he writes to Teedon,¹¹ "Dear sir, on Saturday you saw me a

⁸ Oct. 7.

⁹ The word is used in its sectarian meaning.

¹⁰ Oct. 13.

¹¹ Oct. 16.

little better than I had been when I wrote last ; but the night following brought with it an uncommon deluge of distress, such as entirely overwhelmed and astonished me. My horrors were not to be described. But on Sunday, while I walked with Mrs. Unwin and my cousin¹² in the orchard, it pleased God to enable me once more to approach Him in prayer, and I prayed silently for every thing that lay nearest my heart with a considerable degree of liberty. Nor did I let slip the occasion of praying for you.

"This experience I take to be a fulfilment of those words :

"*'The ear of the Lord is open to them that fear him, and He will hear their cry.'*

"The next morning, at my waking, I heard these :

"*'Fulfil thy promise to me.'*

"And ever since I was favored with that spiritual freedom to make my requests known to God, I have enjoyed some quiet, though not uninterrupted by threatenings of the enemy.

"Mrs. Unwin has had a good night, and is in tolerable spirits this morning."

The words which Cowper supposed to have been fulfilled, were probably some which the schoolmaster had communicated to him as an answer received to his prayers, and which had been entered accordingly in his register. The effect is alluded to in his next letter to Mr. Newton, to whom he had not written before since his return from Sussex.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Oct. 18, 1792.

I thought that the wonder had been all on my side, having been employed in wondering at your silence, as long as you at mine. Soon after our arrival at Eartham, I received a letter from you, which I answered, if not by the return of the post, at least in a day or two. Not that I should have insisted on the ceremonial of letter for letter, during so long a period, could I have found leisure to double your debt ; but while there, I had no

¹² Johnson.

opportunity for writing, except now and then a short one; for we breakfasted early, studied Milton as soon as breakfast was over, and continued in that employment till Mrs. Unwin came forth from her chamber, to whom all the rest of my time was necessarily devoted. Our return to Weston was on the nineteenth of last month, according to your information. You will naturally think that, in the interval, I must have had sufficient leisure to give you notice of our safe arrival. But the fact has been otherwise. I have neither been well myself, nor is Mrs. Unwin, though better, so much improved in her health, as not still to require my continual assistance. My disorder has been the old one, to which I have been subject so many years, and especially about this season — a nervous fever; not, indeed, so oppressive as it has sometimes proved, but sufficiently alarming both to Mrs. Unwin and myself, and such as made it neither easy nor proper for me to make much use of my pen, while it continued. At present I am tolerably free from it — a blessing for which I believe myself partly indebted to the use of James's powder, in small quantities; and partly to a small quantity of laudanum, taken every night — but chiefly to a manifestation of God's presence vouchsafed to me a few days since; transient, indeed, and dimly seen, through a mist of many fears and troubles, but sufficient to convince me, at least while the Enemy's power is a little restrained, that He has not cast me off forever.

Our visit was a pleasant one; as pleasant as Mrs. Unwin's weakness, and the state of my spirits, never very good, would allow. As to my own health, I never expected that it would be much improved by the journey; nor have I found it so. Some benefit, indeed, I hoped; and, perhaps, a little more than I found. But the season was, after the first fortnight, extremely unfavorable, stormy, and wet; and the prospects, though grand and magnificent, yet rather of a melancholy cast, and consequently not very propitious to me. The cultivated appearance of Weston suits my frame of mind far better than wild hills that aspire to be mountains, covered with vast unfrequented woods, and here and there affording a peep between their summits

at the distant ocean. Within doors all was hospitality and kindness, but the scenery *would* have its effect ; and though delightful in the extreme to those who had spirits to bear it, was too gloomy for me.

Yours, my dear friend,
Most sincerely,

W. C.

His cousin Johnson, who had returned with him from Eartham, and remained with him about four weeks, left him at this time, with a promise of returning shortly. "My dear Johnny," Cowper writes to him,¹³ "you are too useful when you are here not to be missed on a hundred occasions daily ; and too much domesticated with us not to be regretted always. I hope, therefore, that your month or six weeks will not be like many that I have known, capable of being drawn out into any length whatever, and productive of nothing but disappointment." He then told him that he had composed part of his sonnet to Romney, at which he had made daily attempts since he came back from Sussex ; "even this small produce," said he, "which my steril intellect has hardly yielded at last, may serve to convince you that in point of spirits I am not worse. In fact I am a little better. The powders and the laudanum together have, for the present at least, abated the fever that consumes them ; and in measure as the fever abates, I acquire a less discouraging view of things, and with it a little power to exert myself."

The laudanum was taken in small doses ; notwithstanding his distressful nights, he never abused that remedy, nor did his uncomfortable feelings ever tempt him to have recourse to stimulants of any kind. Indeed, he never tampered with his bodily complaints, when he knew them to be such ; it was the miserable error of mistaking his sensations and fancies for spiritual impressions, which made him consult Teedon upon what he termed his experiences, — certainly not without faith in his responses, but without enough to counteract his own delusions, which now continually strengthened, and perhaps were the more confirmed by this

¹³ Oct. 19.

mysterious intercourse. His next letter to the schoolmaster says,¹⁴ "In this world, at least with me, evil is abiding, and good transient. I have had distressing times, and not few, since the comfortable experience of yesterday se'nnight; and in one instance it has been so depreciated in my view, that I was able to build nothing upon it, but rather perverted it to my greater discomfiture. At present, however, I am in tolerable spirits, and I should have better, if the work enjoined me were not altogether at a stand. The non-performance of it is a burden that always depresses me, and how to perform it, I find not; neither can I reconcile a providential deprivation of the means with a providential call to the undertaking. It is certain that, Mrs. Unwin continuing helpless as she is, the thing is impracticable.

"If the weather will permit, we shall be glad of your company at dinner to-day at four o'clock. William Kitchenier is here, and will attend you home. But we leave you entirely at your option, and if you had rather wait till the weather becomes more settled, and the ways more passable, do so."

Cowper now described himself as proceeding "much after the old rate; rising cheerless and distressed in the morning, and brightening a little as the day went on."¹⁵ "In the evenings," said he,¹⁶ "I read Baker's Chronicle to Mrs. Unwin, having no other history; and hope in time to be as well versed in it as his admirer Sir Roger de Coverley." "Nothing done, my dearest brother," he says to Hayley,¹⁷ "nor likely to be done at present; yet I purpose in a day or two to make another attempt, to which, however, I shall address myself with fear and trembling, like a man, who, having sprained his wrist, dreads to use it. I have not, indeed, like such a man, injured myself by any extraordinary exertion, but seem as much enfeebled as if I had. The consciousness that there is so much to do, and nothing done, is a burden I am not able to bear. Milton especially is my grievance, and I might almost as well be haunted by his ghost, as goaded with continual reproaches for neglecting

¹⁴ Oct. 22.¹⁵ To Mr. Johnson, Oct. 21.¹⁶ To the same, Oct. 19.¹⁷ Oct. 23.

him. I will therefore begin ; I will do my best ; and if, after all, that best prove good for nothing, I will even send the notes, worthless as they are, that I have made already — a measure very disagreeable to myself, and to which nothing but necessity shall compel me.”

The next bulletin to Teedon says,¹⁸ “ You send me much that might refresh and encourage me — but nothing that does. The power with which the words are accompanied to you, is not exerted in my favor. But I endeavor to hold by them, having nothing else to hold by. My nocturnal and morning experiences are such as they have long been ; all my sleep is troubled, and when I wake, I am absorbed in terror. This morning I said to myself, soon after waking, ‘ God alone knows how much better it would have been for me never to have been born ! ’ My best times are the afternoon and evening ; not because I am more spiritual, or have more hope, at these times than at others, but merely because the animal has been recruited by eating and drinking.”

After an interval of five days,¹⁹ he says to the same person, “ By this time you no doubt expect a note from me ; and I write for that reason only, not because I have any thing new to communicate. Nothing in the shape of alteration has occurred since I saw you. The notice you sent me may indeed be excepted, for though it came unaccompanied with the effect, it certainly has the appearance of it. My spirits this morning are in some small degree better than usual, the wasps and hornets having been less busy about me at the time of waking than they generally are ; but my views and prospects continue the same, and I see at present not a shadow of hope that I shall ever find opportunity to proceed with Milton. This is a great trouble to me, and a constant burden upon my spirits, which, added to Mrs. Unwin’s distressing weakness, (for such it is to her, and therefore to me,) is as heavy as I well know how to bear.”

It was now that the strength and sincerity of Cowper’s affection for Mrs. Unwin were tried and proved. Their relative situation to each other had been reversed ; she was the helpless person, and he the attendant and nurse. She

¹⁸ Nov. 2.¹⁹ Nov. 7.

had devoted herself to him at the cost of her health, and the debt of gratitude was repaid by his devoting himself to her at a greater sacrifice. From the time that she had taken him under her care, as long as her mind was unimpaired, she had had no will but his, no "shadow of inclination" but for his good, or for whatever might minister to his comfort. Never was any affection more free from all taint of selfishness, more perfectly disinterested. When his malady required continual vigilance, her days and nights were given to him, regardless of the consequences to herself. But now, as her reasoning faculties decayed, her character underwent, in this respect, a total change, and she exacted constant attention from him, without the slightest consideration for his health, or state of mind, or any regard to the injurious effect which was perceptibly produced. Poor creatures that we are, even the strength of religious principle and virtuous habit fails us if reason fails! But there is this consolation for those who contemplate the most humiliating condition to which human nature can be reduced, that when that fails, moral responsibility ceases; and there remain for the afflicted, in sure reversion, deliverance in the course of nature, — and in the course of providence, God's mercy and the reward of the righteous.

"I wish," says Cowper to Mr. Rose,²⁰ "that I were as industrious and as much occupied as you, though in a different way; but it is not so with me. Mrs. Unwin's great debility (who is not yet able to move without assistance) is of itself a hinderance such as would effectually disable me. Till she can work and read, and fill up her time as usual, (all which is at present entirely out of her power,) I may now and then find time to write a letter, but I shall write nothing more. I cannot sit with my pen in my hand, and my books before me, while she is in effect in solitude, silent, and looking at the fire. To this hinderance that other has been added, of which you are already aware — a want of spirits, such as I have never known, when I was not absolutely laid by, since I commenced an author. How long I shall be continued in these uncomfortable circumstances, is known only to Him who, as he will, disposes of us all."

²⁰ Nov. 9.

In the same melancholy strain he writes to Mr. Newton : —

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 11, 1792.

I am not so insensible of your kindness in making me an exception from the number of your correspondents, to whom you forbid the hope of hearing from you till your present labors are ended, as to make you wait longer for an answer to your last ; which, indeed, would have had its answer before this time, had it been possible for me to write. But so many have demands upon me of a similar kind, and while Mrs. Unwin continues an invalid, my opportunities of writing are so few, that I am constrained to incur a long arrear to some with whom I would wish to be punctual. She can at present neither work nor read ; and till she can do both, and amuse herself as usual, my own amusements of the pen must be suspended.

I, like you, have a work before me, and a work to which I should be glad to address myself in earnest, but cannot do it at present. When the opportunity comes, I shall, like you, be under a necessity of interdicting some of my usual correspondents, and of shortening my letters to the excepted few. Many letters and much company are incompatible with authorship, and the one as much as the other. It will be long, I hope, before the world is put in possession of a publication which you design should be posthumous.

O for the day when your expectations of my complete deliverance shall be verified ! At present it seems very remote ; so distant, indeed, that hardly the faintest streak of it is visible in my horizon. The glimpse with which I was favored about a month since, has never been repeated ; and the depression of my spirits has. The future appears gloomy as ever ; and I seem to myself to be scrambling always in the dark, among rocks and precipices, without a guide, but with an enemy ever at my heels, prepared to push me headlong. Thus I have spent twenty years, but thus I shall not spend twenty years more. Long ere that period arrives, the grand question concerning my everlasting weal or woe will be decided.

Adieu, my dear friend. I have exhausted my time, though not filled my paper.

Truly yours,
W. C.

At this time Teedon seems to have advised that he should send to the press such notes on the two first books of the *Paradise Lost* as he had made. To this he objected,²¹ because the splendor of the edition required that the page should be kept clear; because almost all that could be done in the way of notes had been done by very able hands, and because it was impossible in notes to do justice to the doctrinal passages, which, he said, was the most important consideration of all. "But what," said he, "is my hope that I shall ever execute my intentions? Truly a leaf driven by the wind of a thousand tempests. The fever on my spirits, from which, except in the heat of the first part of August, I have hardly been free this half year, still continues, and distressed me more last night than at any period in all that time. I waked very often, and always after waking was almost bent double with misery. Yet in one of my short sleeps I dreamed that I had God's presence in a slight measure, and exclaimed under the impression of it,

"I know that Thou art infinitely gracious; but what will become of me?"

"This fever keeps me always in terror, for it has ever been the harbinger of my worst indispositions. As to prayer, the very Collects you mention have been the prayers that I have generally used when I have felt the least encouragement to pray at all; but I may add, never with any sensible effect. In compliance, however, with your call to that service, I will use them again, and be careful not to omit them, at least till the time you mention is expired. Yet if faith be necessary to effectuate prayer, alas, what chance have mine!"

Poor Cowper's malady was too strong to be overcome by the faith which he would fain have placed in Teedon. After obeying his injunction more than a week, he reported

²¹ Nov. 13.

to him the result.²² "I have now persevered in the punctual performance of the duty of prayer as long, and I believe longer, than the time which you specified. Whether any beneficial effect has followed, I cannot say. My wakings in the night have certainly been somewhat less painful and terrible than they were; but this I cannot help ascribing to the agency of an anodyne which I have constantly used lately at bed-time. Of one thing, however, I am sure, which is, that I have had no spiritual anodyne vouchsafed to *me*. My nights having been somewhat less disturbed, my days have of course been such likewise; but a settled melancholy overclouds them all; nothing cheers me, nothing inspires me with hope. It is even miraculous in my own eyes that, always occupied as I am in the contemplation of the most distressing subjects, I am not absolutely incapacitated for the common offices of life.

"My purpose is to continue such prayer as I can make, although with all this reason to conclude that it is not accepted, and though I have been more than once forbidden, in my own apprehension, by Him to whom it is addressed. You will tell me, that God never forbids any body to pray, but on the contrary, encourages all to do it. I answer—No. Some he does not encourage, and some he even forbids; not by words perhaps, but by a secret negative found only in their experience."

It is a proof of Cowper's good nature, that when the successor of the Northampton Clerk came with a petition at this time that he would be pleased to assist him with "a copy of Mortuary Verses, as he had assisted his predecessor,"—though two years had elapsed without such an application, and he had "well hoped that he was out of his office,"—and though "involved in many arrears on other subjects, and having very little dependence on his ability to write at all,"—he yet "reluctantly promised to comply," and fulfilled his promise.

"I proceed," says he to his cousin Johnson,²³ "exactly as when you were here,—a letter now and then before breakfast, and the rest of my time all holiday; if holiday

²² Nov. 21.

²³ Nov. 20.

it may be called, that is spent chiefly in moping and musing, and 'forecasting the fashion of uncertain evils.'" Now and then something like a secret whisper appeared, and encouraged him that his engagement concerning Milton would yet be performed. "You wish me warm in my work," said he to Hayley,²⁴ "and I ardently wish the same; but when I shall be so, God only knows. My melancholy, which seemed a little alleviated for a few days, has gathered about me again, with as black a cloud as ever: the consequence is — absolute incapacity to begin."

The sanest patient could not have observed his own symptoms more carefully, nor given a more clear and coherent account of them to his physician, than Cowper noticed his own sleeping and waking imaginations, and reported them to the poor, vain man whom he had taken for his spiritual adviser. "Dear sir," he says,²⁵ "since I wrote last, my experience has held the same tenor of despair, despondence, and dejection; but having had a quiet night, my spirits are a little raised this morning. My nights, indeed, have lately been less infected with horrid dreams and wakings, and I would willingly hope that it is an answer to the prayers I offer, lifeless as they are. I shall not discontinue the practice, you may be sure, so long as I have even this encouragement to observe it."

"Two or three nights since, I dreamed that I had God's presence largely, and seemed to pray with much liberty. I then proceeded dreaming about many other things, all vain and foolish; but at last I dreamed that, recollecting my pleasant dream, I congratulated myself on the exact recollection that I had of my prayer, and of all that passed in it. But when I waked, not a single word could I remember. These words were, however, very audibly spoken to me in the moment of waking —

Sacrum est quod dixi.

"It seems strange that I should be made to felicitate myself on remembering what in reality it was designed that

²⁴ Nov. 25.

²⁵ Nov. 28.

I should not remember; for the single circumstance that my heart had been enlarged was all that remained with me.

"I thank you for sending your last notice immediately after you received it. It came very seasonably, when it was much wanted; not that any single word of all that are given you is ever sealed to me, but simple water is a cordial to a person fainting."

"Dear sir,³⁶ in your last experience, extraordinary as it was, I found nothing presumptuous. God is free to manifest himself, both in manner and measure, as he pleases; and to you he is pleased to manifest himself uncommonly in both. It would be better with poor me, if, being the subject of so many of your manifestations, (for which I desire to be thankful both to God and you,) I were made in some small degree at least partaker of the comfort of them. But except that my nights are less molested than they used to be, I perceive at present no alteration at all for the better. My days are, many of them, stormy in the extreme, and the best of them are darkly clouded with melancholy.

"Still I am waiting for freedom of mind and spirit, as well as for leisure and opportunity, to proceed with Milton. Yet the answers you have received to your prayers on that subject have been so explicit, that I know not how to desire you to make it a matter of prayer again. It is certain, nevertheless, that without some great change both in my mind and outward circumstances, I shall never be able to perform that work, or never able to perform it well. My eyes, too, for a long time have been inflamed to a degree that would alone disable me for such a labor. God knows how much I feel myself in want of animal spirits, courage, hope, and all mutual requisites, — to a wonderful degree, considering the prayers that have been made, and the answers that have been obtained about it.

"You ought not to suffer anxiety on temporal accounts to rob you of your peace, as I suspect it has done lately. He that gives you so plentifully the bread of life, will he not give you the bread that perishes? Doubtless he will. Fear not."

"Dear sir,²⁷ I awoke this morning with these words relating to my work, loudly and distinctly spoken —

"*'Apply assistance in my case, indigent and necessitous.'*

"And about three mornings since with these —

"*'It will not be by common and ordinary means.'*

"It seems better, therefore, that I should wait till it shall please God to set my wheels in motion, than make another beginning only to be obliterated like the two former.

"I have also heard these words on the same subject —

"*'Meantime raise an expectation and desire of it among the people.'*

"My experiences this week have been for the most part dreadful in the extreme, and to such a degree, in one instance, that poor Mrs. Unwin has been almost as much in an agony as myself. Yet some little abatements have been intermingled; but very slight, so slight as almost to leave me hopeless as they found me. I cannot, indeed, be properly said to possess any hope at all; for if I seem for a short season to have one, it is always in the enemy's power with one puff to blow it all away, and he never fails to do it."

It was some relief to him when he was assured that there was no reason why he should make himself uneasy concerning Milton, for the artists who were engaged for the work were not likely to be very expeditious; and as it was to be published in parts, a small portion only would be wanted from him at once. That labor, he thought, would not be too heavy for him, if he had health and leisure. "But the season," said he,²⁸ "is unfavorable to me respecting the former, and Mrs. Unwin's present weakness allows me less of the latter than the occasion seems to call for. The season of the year is particularly adverse to me, yet not in itself, perhaps, more adverse than any other; but the approach of it always reminds me of the same season in the dreadful 1773, and in the more dreadful 1787. I cannot help terrifying myself with doleful misgivings and apprehensions; nor is the enemy negligent to seize all the advantage that the occasion gives him. Thus, hearing much from him, and having little or no sensible support from God, I suffer inexpressible things till January is over.

²⁷ Dec. 8.

²⁸ To Mr. Newton, Dec. 9.

And even then, whether increasing years have made me more liable to it, or despair the longer it lasts grows naturally darker, I find myself more inclined to melancholy than I was a few years since. God only knows where this will end ; but where it is likely to end, unless He interpose powerfully in my favor, all may know."

But while Cowper thus communicated his dark forebodings to Mr. Newton, he reserved the details of his "experiences" for one from whom he was sure of receiving no remonstrance, or representation of the unreasonableness and danger of the course which he was now pursuing, and by whom all would be received and commented on as matter of fact. His next report²⁹ to the schoolmaster says, "You have waited thus long for a note from me, only because I have nothing to communicate but my distress, which it seems more charitable to keep to myself. At last, however, distressed as I still am, I write, lest I should cause you greater trouble by my silence. Yesterday, having had a quiet night, I was tolerably well in spirits ; but, yesterday excepted, I have had a woful week, and am this day as dejected as ever. My nights are almost all haunted with notices of great affliction at hand,—of what kind I know not ; but in degree such as I shall with extreme difficulty sustain, and hardly at last find deliverance. At four this morning, I started out of a dream, in which I seemed sitting before the fire, and very close to it, in great trouble ; when suddenly stamping violently with my foot, and springing suddenly from my seat, I awoke, and heard these words—

"I hope the Lord will carry me through it."

"This needs no interpretation. It is plainly a forewarning of woe to come ; and though you may tell me I ought to take comfort from the hope expressed in the words, yet truly I cannot. I know too well what it is to be carried through affliction, as to be left to feel all its bitterness ; and after the thousand experiences that I have had of that sort, tremble at the approach of a new one ; beside which, the notice being general, and no particular quarter signified, from which I may expect the cloud that threatens me, my

imagination is left free to create an endless train of horrid phantoms, with which it terrifies itself; and which are some of them, perhaps, more to be dreaded than the reality

"The promise, that in God we shall have peace, has certainly a comfortable aspect on the future; but He knows that I never have at present a moment's peace in Him.

"Mrs. Unwin is pretty well this morning, except that she shares with me in my alarms. She joins me in kind remembrances."

"Dear sir, the day has not risen upon me since I wrote last, when I could have addressed you in any other language than that of the deepest melancholy; nor do I write now, because I have any thing more acceptable to say, but merely that you may know I am not unmindful of you. My views of the future are still as disheartening as ever. God is as far from me, and consequently all spiritual relief, as ever. My distress, before I rise in the morning, is hardly supportable; and such as it is when I rise, it often continues through the day, though sometimes the incidents of it call my attention from myself a little, and a slight abatement is the consequence. But comforts of this kind afford me none in affliction; because the remedy is not that of the good Physician, but such as the world furnishes to its own. Milton is still a mountain on my shoulders; and it seems to me, that if the new year brings with it no favorable change for me, either in outward circumstances or mental qualifications, I must at last relinquish him. But we expect Mr. and Mrs. Rose from London to-morrow. They will be here by dinner-time, and purpose to stay about ten days. With him I mean to converse on this subject; for there is no man better qualified, in respect of acquaintance with the literary world, to give me counsel."

Thus it appeared more and more that in his diseased state of mind, the engagement with Johnson, instead of keeping him pleasantly employed, as Mrs. Unwin expected when it was formed, had become a cause of uneasiness and irritation, which even the publisher's assurances, that there was time enough before him, could not allay. Such an assurance cheered him for the day; but then the con-

sciousness that he had a task to perform returned upon him ; and that it was not, like his translation of Homer, set by himself, and to be performed at his own will, but a matter of contract which he was bound to. "The year ninety-two," said he to Hayley,³⁰ "shall stand chronicled in my remembrance as the most melancholy that I have ever known, except the few weeks that I spent at Eartham ; and such it has been principally, because, being engaged to Milton, I felt myself no longer free for any other engagement."

The new year opened with better omens to his fancy. "This morning," he writes,³¹ "I am in rather a more cheerful frame of mind than usual, having had two notices of a more comfortable cast than the generality of mine. I waked, saying,

"I shall perish ;"

which was immediately answered by a vision of a wine-glass, and these words—

"A whole glass ;"

in allusion, no doubt, to the famous story of Mrs. Honeywood.

"Soon after, I heard these —

"I see in this case just occasion of pity."

The "famous story," by which Cowper interpreted this illusion, and from which the waking vision that recalled it probably itself arose, is related by Fuller, who enumerates Mary, the wife of Robert Honeywood, of Charing, in Kent, among the memorable persons of that county, as "abundantly entitled to memorability, for having at her decease three hundred and sixty-seven³² persons lawfully descended from her." He deemed her, however, "more memorable on another account, to wit, for patient weathering out the tempest of a troubled conscience, whereon," says he, "a re-

³⁰ Dec. 26.

³¹ To Teedon, Jan. 1, 1793.

³² "Sixteen of her own body, one hundred and fourteen grandchildren, two hundred and twenty-eight in the third generation, and nine in the fourth." Yet she was "much outstript in point of fruitfulness (though she had a child for every day in the year, though leap-year, and one over) by Dame Hester Temple, the lady of Sir Thomas Temple, of Stowe, in Buckinghamshire, who, having four sons and nine daughters, lived to see seven hundred descendants. Reader," says Fuller, "I speak within compass, and have left myself a reserve, having bought the truth hereof by a wager I lost."

markable story dependeth. Being much afflicted in mind, many ministers repaired to her, and amongst the rest Reverend Master John Fox, than whom no more happy an instrument to set the joints of a broken spirit. All his counsels proved ineffectual, insomuch that, in the agony of her soul, having a Venice glass in her hand, she brake forth into this expression: 'I am as surely damned as this glass is broken!' which she immediately threw with violence to the ground. Here happened a wonder; the glass rebounded again, and was taken up whole and entire. I confess it is possible (though difficult) so casually to throw as brittle a substance, that, lighting on the edge, it may be preserved; but happening immediately in that juncture of time, it seemed little less than miraculous. However, the gentlewoman took no comfort thereat, (as some have reported, and more have believed,) but continued a long time after (short is long to people in pain) in her former disconsolate condition, without any amendment; until, at last, God, the great clock-keeper of time, who findeth out the fittest minutes for his own mercies, suddenly shot comfort like lightning into her soul; which, once entered, ever remained therein; (God doth not palliate cures; what he heals, it holds;) so that she led the remainder of her life in spiritual gladness. This she herself told to the Reverend Father Thomas Morton, Bishop of Durham, from whose mouth I have received this relation."

Cowper's malady was more deeply rooted; the comfort which he derived from one illusion was destroyed by the next disheartening one. Perhaps no other case of insanity was ever recorded with such curious power of self-observation. It appears from the next communication to Teedon, that he had some minor engagement with Johnson, — possibly for the *Analytical Review*. "Dear sir," he says,³³ "if you are called to carry my troubles, it is no wonder that you feel yourself sometimes immersed in sorrow and dependency. As for me, I find no sensible relief at all, except what I must attribute to the effect of an opiate, in which I mean to indulge myself till this month be over.

"I have had a small matter to do for Johnson in the lit-

³³ Jan. 4, 1793.

erary way this half year, and through mere incapacity and lowness of spirits, have been obliged to neglect it. In other days it would have cost me but a single morning. Last night I received a letter from him requiring it speedily; and this morning I awoke out of a dream that has disabled me more than ever. I would relate it, but have not time: its tendency, however, was to inculcate the doctrine of difficulties to be surmounted by unassisted me, and therefore insurmountable.

"These experiences kill all the little comfort which the present moment, though bad, yet not so bad as I am made to expect, might otherwise yield me. Time passes: I have many things to do, one of them arduous indeed; I mean Milton. God is silent; prayer obtains no answer; one discouragement treads on the heels of another, and the consequence is, that I do nothing but prognosticate my own destruction."

The next is in a still more unhappy strain.³⁴

"Dear sir, nothing new has occurred in my experience since we saw you, one circumstance excepted, of the distressing kind. I have often told you that the notices given to you come to me unattended by any sensible effect; yet, believing that they are from God, and gracious answers to your prayers, I have been accustomed to lean a little upon them, and have been the better enabled to sustain the constant pressure of my burdens. But of late I have been totally deprived even of that support, having been assured that though they are indeed from God, so far from being designed as comforts to me, to me they are reproaches, biting sarcasms, sharp strokes of irony,—in short, the deadliest arrows to be found in the quiver of the Almighty. To you indeed they are manna, and to Mrs. Unwin, because you are both at peace with God; but to me, who have unpardonably offended him, they are a cup of deadly wine, against which there is no antidote. So the cloudy pillar was light to Israel, but darkness and horror to Egypt.

"I have nothing in the shape of an answer to this suggestion. My experience, the desertion that I endure, my frequent agonies of despair, all tend to give it credit and

³⁴ Jan. 25.

confirmation.—Why have they never given me, in any single instance, the least sensible comfort? Do they not profess to have me for their object? And yet I alone receive no benefit from them.

"This has much the appearance under which I have been taught to view them; and those in particular which seemed to encourage me in my work, and to promise me success if I attempted it, have been twice demonstrated to have no such meaning, or not to have meant it seriously, by the complete failure of my endeavors.

"In other respects I am much as usual, and so is Mrs. Unwin, except that this sad and dreary season is hurtful to us both, by confining us."

Even, however, at this time he could still interest himself upon that great work which had afforded him constant and happy occupation during so many years. When he told Hayley that his idleness, or more truly his difficulties, were proof against all the exhortations that he received from Earham, he added,³⁵ "Something indeed I do. I play at push-pin with Homer every morning before breakfast, fingering and polishing as Paris did his armor." Johnson had said that the translation would "begin to be reviewed in the next Analytical, and that he hoped the reviewal would not offend him." "By this," said Cowper, "I understand that, if I am not offended, it will be owing more to my own equanimity than to the mildness of the critic. So be it! He will put an opportunity of victory over myself into my hands, and I will endeavor not to lose it." This, however, was no effort of self-command in him; for though well pleased with praise, there is not in his letters a single passage from which it can be inferred that he was at any time annoyed by censure. The reason wherefore private criticism vexed him when it recommended alterations in his unpublished poems was, that it put him, in many cases, to unprofitable trouble, and perhaps required him, in some, to yield his own judgment, rather than contend for things trifling in single instances, but in the whole of a composition of more importance than persons not accustomed to the art of poetry themselves can easily be made to understand.

He had now some prospect of profiting by his past labors. Johnson had proposed not only to print a handsome quarto edition of his poems in two volumes, but to make him a present of the entire profits. This was intended to accompany a second edition of his *Homer*, and Abbot's portrait was to be engraved for it. Cowper demurred at the portrait. "Johnson's plan," said he to Mr. Rose,³⁶ "of prefixing my phiz to the new edition of my poems is by no means a pleasant one to me; and so I told him in a letter I sent him from Eartham, in which I assured him that my objections to it would not be easily surmounted. But if you judge that it may really have an effect in advancing the sale, I would not be so squeamish as to suffer the spirit of prudery to prevail in me to his disadvantage. Somebody told an author, (I forget whom,) that there was more vanity in refusing his picture than in granting it; on which he instantly complied. I do not perfectly feel all the force of the argument; but it shall content me that he did."

At the winding up his accounts for the *Homer*, (which Mr. Rose transacted for him,) he says,³⁷ "Few of my concerns have been so happily concluded. I am now satisfied with my bookseller, as I have substantial cause to be, and account myself in good hands — a circumstance as pleasant to me as any other part of the business; for I love dearly to be able to confide with all my heart in those with whom I am connected, of what kind soever the connection may be." On this occasion it appears that Johnson's intentions were carried into effect in a different way from what he had proposed, but equally to Cowper's satisfaction. Writing to his cousin of Norfolk, he says,³⁸ "The long muster-roll of my great and small ancestors I signed, and dated, and sent up to Mr. Blue-mantle on Monday, according to your desire. Such a pompous affair drawn out for my sake, reminds me of the old fable of the mountain in parturition, and a mouse the produce. Rest undisturbed, say I, their lordly, ducal, and royal dust! Had they left me something handsome, I should have respected them more. But perhaps they did not know that such a one as I should have the honor to be numbered among their descendants. Well!

³⁶ Nov. 9, 1792.³⁷ March 27,³⁸ April 11.

I have a little bookseller that makes me some amends for this deficiency. He has made me a present — an act of liberality which I take every opportunity to blazon, as it well deserves.”

Lady Hesketh had been prevented from making her autumnal visit by the state of her health, which rendered it advisable for her to pass some time at Bath. “You know not what you lose,” Cowper says to her,³⁹ “by being absent from Weston at this moment. We have just received from Johnny a cask of the best Holland gin; and in a few days I shall receive from Charlotte Smith a present of her novel, not yet published, entitled the Old Manor House, in three volumes. How happy wouldst thou find thyself in the enjoyment of both these articles at once!” In a like cheerful strain he thanks his Norfolk kinsman for other presents of a different kind; one of which, neither Norfolk, nor Salisbury Plain, nor perhaps any part of England, could at this time supply.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

Io Pæan!

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,

Jan. 31, 1793.

Even as you foretold, so it came to pass. On Tuesday I received your letter, and on Tuesday came the pheasants; for which I am indebted in many thanks, as well as Mrs. Unwin, both to your kindness and to your kind friend Mr. Copeman.

In Copeman's ear this truth let Echo tell, —
 “Immortal bards like mortal pheasants well;”
 And when his clerkship's out, I wish him herds
 Of golden clients for his golden birds.

Our friends the Courtenays have never dined with us since their marriage, *because* we have never asked them; and we have never asked them, *because* poor Mrs. Unwin is not so equal to the task of providing for and entertaining company as before this last illness. But this is no objection to the arrival here of a bustard; rather it is a cause for which we shall be particularly glad to see the monster. It will be a

handsome present to *them*. So let the bustard come, as the Lord Mayor of London said of the hare, when he was hunting, — “Let her come, a’ God’s name! I am not afraid of her!”

Adieu, my dear cousin and caterer. My eyes are terribly bad; else I had much more to say to you.

Ever affectionately yours,

W. C.

On the second day only after this sportive letter had been written, the insane mind predominated again, and he wrote thus to Teedon: — ⁴⁰

“It is with great unwillingness that I write, knowing that I *can* say nothing but what will distress you. I despair of every thing, and my despair is perfect, because it is founded on a persuasion that there is no effectual help for me, even in God.

“From four this morning till after seven, I lay meditating terrors, such terrors as no language can express, and as no heart, I am sure, but mine ever knew. My very finger-ends tingled with it, as indeed they often do. I then slept, and dreamed a long dream, in which I told Mrs. U. with many tears that my salvation is impossible, for the reason given above. I recapitulated, in the most impassioned accent and manner, the unexampled severity of God’s dealings with me in the course of the last twenty years, especially in the year 73, and again in 86, and concluded all with observing that I *must* infallibly perish, and that the Scriptures which speak of the insufficiency of man to save himself can never be understood *unless* I perish.

“I then made a sudden transition in my dream to one of the public streets in London, where I was met by a dray; the forehorse of the team came full against me, and in violent anger I damned the drayman for it.

“Such are my nocturnal experiences, and my daily ones are little better. — I know that I have much fever, but it is a fever for which there is no cure, and is as much the afflictive hand of God upon me, as any other circumstance of my distress,

⁴⁰ Feb. 2, 1793.

"I thank you for your two last. Delay is no denial indeed ; but in extremities such as mine, it is very severe and hard to bear."

He now expressed his concern lest the schoolmaster's health should suffer, by the earnest solicitude, and the frequent mortification and disappointments which he underwent on his account. "But if God indeed employ you," said he,⁴¹ "and if he himself interest you in my cause, as I trust he does, then all fear is groundless." He tells him that finding his nights intolerable, he had again had recourse to a few drops of laudanum, and had been somewhat relieved ; but spiritual relief seemed as distant as ever. "While I can amuse myself with a pen or a book, I am easy ; but the moment I lay them down, I begin instantly to ruminate on the various experiences of the last twenty years, and among them find a multitude that seem absolutely and forever to forbid all hope of mercy. Some of them are indeed so emphatically forbidding, that unless it shall please God himself to explain them to a different sense, and to a sense of which they do not appear to be susceptible, I know not how it is possible that I should ever hope again ; at least with steadfastness. While they are out of my mind, I may perhaps have something like a hope ; but on the instant of recollection, even the strongest confidence must yield. For, though all things are possible to God, it is not possible that He should save whom he has declared he will destroy."

The next is a more remarkable communication.⁴²

"Dear sir, my experience since I saw you affords, on recollection, nothing worthy to be sent to Olney, except the following notice, which I commit to writing, and communicate as a kind of curiosity, rather than for any other reason ; though Milton, who is at present an interesting character to us both, is undoubtedly the subject of it.

"I waked the other morning with these words distinctly spoken to me —

"Charles the Second, though he was or wished to be accounted a man of fine taste and an admirer of the Arts,

⁴¹ Feb. 8.

⁴² Feb. 22.

never saw or expressed a wish to see the man whom he would have found alone superior to all the race of man.'

"But in such a notice as this, I find nothing to comfort, nothing spiritual. A thousand such would do me no real service. A single word of Christ is worth all that can be said, either by men or angels, concerning all the men of genius that ever lived ; but such word I seldom hear."

In this instance Cowper perceived of what materials his morning experiences were made ; but if he had been more capable of reasoning justly upon that perception, any such approach to sanity would have been counteracted by the belief which Mrs. Unwin now, as well as the poor school-master, entertained in the dangerous superstition that possessed him. He could write sanely and playfully about his dreams at this very time to Hayley.⁴³ "O, you rogue," he says to him, "what would you give to have such a dream about Milton, as I had about a week since? I dreamed that being in a house in the city, and with much company, looking towards the lower end of the room from the upper end of it, I descried a figure, which I immediately knew to be Milton's. He was very gravely, but very neatly attired in the fashion of his day, and had a countenance which filled me with those feelings that an affectionate child has for a beloved father ; such, for instance, as Tom has for you. My first thought was wonder, where he could have been concealed so many years ; my second, a transport of joy to find him still alive ; my third, another transport to find myself in his company ; and my fourth, a resolution to accost him. I did so, and he received me with a complacency, in which I saw equal sweetness and dignity. I spoke of his *Paradise Lost*, as every man must, who is worthy to speak of it at all, and told him a long story of the manner in which it affected me, when I first discovered it, being at that time a schoolboy. He answered me by a smile, and a gentle inclination of his head. He then grasped my hand affectionately, and with a smile that charmed me said, 'Well, you for your part will do well also.' At last, recollecting his great age, (for I understood him to be two hundred years old,) I feared that I might fatigue him by

much talking ; I took my leave, and he took his with an air of the most perfect good-breeding. His person, his features, his manner, were all so perfectly characteristic, that I am persuaded an apparition of him could not represent him more completely. This may be said to have been one of the dreams of Pindus ; may it not ? ”

Cowper saw clearly here that this was such a dream as his daily thoughts were likely to produce, only in its way, “ a kind of curiosity,” — “ one of the dreams of Pindus.” But he received as mysterious all that bore, or could be made to bear, relation to the single point on which his mind was diseased. “ In less than a week,” he says to Teedon,⁴⁴ “ I was visited with a horrible dream, in which I seemed to be taking a final leave of my dwelling, and every object with which I have been most familiar, on the evening before my execution. I felt the tenderest regret at the separation, and looked about for something durable to carry with me as a memorial. The iron hasp of the garden-door presenting itself, I was on the point of taking that ; but recollecting that the heat of the fire in which I was going to be tormented would fuse the metal, and that it would therefore only serve to increase my insupportable misery, I left it. I then awoke in all the horror with which the reality of such circumstances would fill me.”

In another communication he says,⁴⁵ “ A temporary suspension of terror was audibly announced to me some time since, and except in one or two instances, has been fulfilled ; but in other respects I perceive no difference. Neither waking nor sleeping have I any communications from God, but am perfectly a withered tree, fruitless and leafless. A consciousness that He exists, — that once He favored me, but that I have offended to the forfeiture of all such mercies, is ever present with me ; and of such thoughts consists the whole of my religious experiences.”

This interval was, as might be expected, of no long continuance ; and he informs Teedon that the return of those terrible impressions had been announced to him in these words —

“ ‘ *I have got my old wakings again !* ’ ”

⁴⁴ March 1.

⁴⁵ March 14.

"If they continue, they will completely disqualify me for all sorts of writing. It was owing to them that I was idle all the winter, which has thrown me behind to such a degree, that I am now always in a hurry. In short, I find so little done in answer to so many prayers, and for the accomplishment of so many promises, of which I have now almost four quarto volumes, that I am perfectly at a loss to understand the dispensation. The peace of three persons at least is concerned, and yet all remains as it was. Many years I have been threatened with a season worse than all the past, a season that shall be fatal and final; and still I am threatened with such a season. My only hope is founded in Mrs. Unwin's acceptableness with God, and yours. For as to my own, unconnected with my interest in her prayers and yours, I have too mean an opinion of it to suppose that I can build at all upon it.

"In the winter I expected to be crushed before spring, and now I expect to be crushed before winter. I were better never to have been born than to live such a life of terrible expectation."

He now dreamed that Dr. Kerr prescribed death to him, as the only preventive of madness; — the only cure for it, in his case, it now too surely was! — "Your experiences," he says to Teedon,⁴⁶ "have a difference in them. If you are cast down, you are comforted and raised again. But as for mine, they proceed in one dull train, unvaried, unless sometimes by darker shades than usual. Thus it has happened to me since I saw you. During two days I rejected entirely all your notices; and if I have since experienced some little degree of belief in them, it has not been on account of the smallest encouragement, for I have received none; but perhaps because the temptation to cast them away is abated."

And now Cowper began to think it "strange that the prayers and promises of some years should remain still so entirely unanswered and unaccomplished; and that his own experience and the schoolmaster's should make a series of exact contradictions. "You," said he,⁴⁷ "receive assur-

⁴⁶ March 30.

⁴⁷ May 16,

ances almost as often as you pray, of spiritual good things intended for me ; and I feel in the mean time every thing that denotes a man an outcast and a reprobate. I dream in the night that God has rejected me finally, and that all promises and all answers to prayer made for me are mere delusions. I wake under a strong and clear conviction that these communications are from God, and in the course of the day nothing occurs to invalidate that persuasion. As I have said before, there is a mystery in this matter that I am not able to explain. I believe myself the only instance of a man to whom God will promise every thing, and perform nothing."

This was a notion over which he had brooded for the last seven years, and he reasoned upon it thus to the poor simple man whom he had chosen, not for his philosopher, but in a certain sense for his guide and friend. ⁴⁸ " I have already told you that I heard a word in the year 86, which has been a stone of stumbling to me ever since. It was this —

" *' I will promise you any thing.'*

" This word, taken in connection with my experience, such as it has been ever since, seems so exactly accomplished, that it leaves me no power at all to believe the promises made to you. You will tell me that it was not from God. By what token am I to prove that ? My experience verifies it. In the day I am occupied with my studies, which, whatever they are, are certainly not of a spiritual kind. In the night I generally sleep well, but wake always under a terrible impression of the wrath of God, and for the most part with words that fill me with alarm, and with the dread of woes to come. What is there in all this that in the least impeaches the truth of the threatening I have mentioned ? *I will promise you any thing* : — that is to say, much as I hate you, and miserable as I design to make you, I will yet bid you be of good cheer and expect the best, at the same time that I will show you no favor. This, you will say, is unworthy of God. Alas ! He is the fittest to judge what is worthy of him, and what is otherwise. I can say but this, that his conduct and dealings are totally changed

toward me. Once He promised me much, and was so kind to me at the same time, that I most confidently expected the performance. Now He promises me as much, but holds me always at an immense distance, and, so far as I know, never deigns to speak to me. What conclusions can I draw from these premises, but that he who once loved now hates me, and is constantly employed in verifying the notice of 86, that is to say, in working distinctly contrary to his promises?

"This is the labyrinth in which I am always bewildered, and from which I have hardly any hope of deliverance."

There was no text in Scripture, he said, less calculated to comfort him, than that which promises comfort to the broken heart: "were there a text which promised it to the nether mill-stone, from such a text as that he might gather hope." Yet he described his spirits as tolerably well in the day, because he kept himself as much employed as he could; and that, together with the assistance which he had gained from despair, was his best remedy. But his hours of occupation were not now so regulated as to employ without fatiguing him. "Thou knowest, I dare say," he says to Lady Hesketh,⁴⁹ "what it is to have a head weary with thinking. Mine is so fatigued by breakfast-time that, three days out of four, I am utterly incapable of sitting down to my desk again for any purpose whatever." This was not to be wondered at, seeing that he rose every morning at six, and fagged till near eleven before he breakfasted; and in consequence was by that time exhausted. "You will say," he says,⁵⁰ "breakfast before you work, and then your work will not fatigue you." I answer, "Perhaps I might, and your counsel would probably prove beneficial; but I cannot spare a moment for eating in the early part of the morning, having no other time for study."

The business which engrossed him thus, was revising his *Homer* for a second edition, and writing notes upon it; and his reason for despatching all that he did in the day before breakfast, was that his whole attention might be given to Mrs. Unwin from the time that she rose. Such an inmate

⁴⁹ May 7.

⁵⁰ To Hayley, May 21.

as Lady Hesketh, or such a neighbor as Lady Austen, might have been of the most important service to him now ; and if Lady Hesketh had been aware how much her presence was needed, she would undoubtedly have set aside all other considerations, and have hastened to Weston. "My dearest cousin," Cowper says to her,⁵¹ "you will not, you say, come to us now ; and you tell us not when you will. These assignations *sine die* are bad things, that I can neither grasp, nor get any comfort from them. Know you not that hope is the next best thing to enjoyment? Give us then a hope, and a determinate time for that hope to fix on, and we will endeavor to be satisfied."

Lady Hesketh was aware that things were going on ill, in one respect, at Weston Lodge, though she knew not, and probably no one besides Teedon and Mrs. Unwin knew, the state of Cowper's mind. She was aware that Mrs. Unwin was no longer capable of managing their expenditure, and she had reason to believe that they were imposed upon, and their means misspent ; and this she hinted to her cousin. "Unless thou tell me," he replied,⁵² "who they are that eat me up alive, I can say nothing about it. In fact, I am eaten up by nothing but an enormous taxation, which has doubled the price of every thing within my memory, and which makes it impossible for a man of small means, like me, to live at all like a gentleman upon his income." — "Thou canst not do better than send me the draft immediately," he says in the same letter ; "for at this season of the year the money birds are full fledged, and fly at an immoderate rate : whole flocks of them disappear in a moment."

Six months afterwards he says to her,⁵³ "You ought not to be surprised that I want money at the half-year's end ; for where is the man who does not ? But whatever you think, never suspect that my wants are occasioned by lavish and undistinguishing bounty. Nobody is less obnoxious to that imputation than I ; you I am sure are not, who give to me. I know who is alluded to in your letter, under the description of a person who lives luxuriously at my cost. But you are misinformed. Unless a pint of ale at meal-

⁵¹ June 1.⁵² Jan. 19.⁵³ June 30.

times be a luxury, there are no luxuries in that man's house, I assure you ; and I can assure you beside, that whatever he has, he has it not by gift of mine ; Mrs. Unwin and I are merely the medium through which the bounty passes, not the authors of it. But we administer it conscientiously, and as in the sight of God ; and are the most scrupulous about it, because it is not ours. As to the rest, we help an old woman or two, whom the parish would starve, if we did not ; and there is the sum total of all the eleemosynary profusion with which we are chargeable !”

Teedon seems to have been the person of whom Cowper speaks, whether Lady Hesketh had him in her mind, or not. In one communication he tells the schoolmaster that his quarterly remittance is ready whenever it may suit him to call for it ; and in another, that they had received their annual remittance from “the secret benefactor to the indigent.” His receipts from Johnson appear to have come in good time, when Mrs. Unwin had expended no small part of her little capital, and his own poor means were diminished. Writing to the faithful friend who acted as his steward in these concerns, he says,⁵⁴ “Your tidings concerning the slender pittance yet to come, are, as you observe, of the melancholy cast. Not being gifted by nature with the means of acquiring much, it is well, however, that she has given me a disposition to be contented with little. I have now been so many years habituated to small matters, that I should probably find myself incommoded by greater ; and may I but be enabled to shift, as I have been hitherto, unsatisfied wishes will never trouble me much. My pen has helped me somewhat ; and after some years’ toil I begin to reap the benefit. Had I begun sooner, perhaps I should have known fewer pecuniary distresses :—Or who can say ? It is possible that I might not have succeeded so well. Fruit ripens only a short time before it rots, and man, in general, arrives not at maturity of mental powers at a much earlier period.”

His letters had now become short and unfrequent, not from any diminution of regard for his correspondents, nor

⁵⁴ To Mr. Hill, March 29.

for want of inclination to what had hitherto been with him a favorite employment, but because of his affectionate attention to Mrs. Unwin. "You will not judge me," he says to Mr. Newton,⁵⁵ "by the unfrequency of my letters; nor suppose that my thoughts about you are equally unfrequent. In truth they are not. No day passes in which you are excluded from them. I am so busy that I do not expect even now to fill my paper. While I write, my poor invalid, who is still unable to amuse herself either with book or needle, sits silent at my side; which makes me, in all my letters, hasten to a conclusion. My only time for study is now before breakfast, and I lengthen it as much as I can by early rising." He regarded it as a good effect of study, that it made him an early riser, who might otherwise, he said, perhaps be as much given to dozing as his readers. But nothing could have been more injurious for him than to curtail that natural sleep which is the best of all restoratives.

"I know not," he tells Mr. Newton,⁵⁶ "that with respect to our health, we are either better or worse than when you saw us. Mrs. Unwin perhaps has gained a little strength, and the advancing spring, I hope, will add to it. As to myself, I am in body, soul, and spirit, *semper idem*. Prayer I know is made for me, and sometimes with great enlargement of heart by those who offer it; and in this circumstance consists the only evidence I can find, that God is still favorably mindful of me, and has not cast me off forever." This was in April. In the June following, he says of Mrs. Unwin,⁵⁷ "In her I cannot perceive any alteration for the better; and must be satisfied, I believe, as indeed I have great reason to be, if she does not alter for the worse. She uses the orchard-walk daily, but always supported between two, and is still unable to employ herself as formerly. But she is cheerful, seldom in much pain, and has always strong confidence in the mercy and faithfulness of God.

"As to myself, I have always the same song to sing, — Well in body, but sick in spirit; sick, nigh unto death.

⁵⁵ April 25.⁵⁶ April 25.⁵⁷ June 12.

Seasons return, but not to me returns
God, or the sweet approach of heavenly day,
Or sight of cheering truth, or pardon sealed,
Or joy, or hope, or Jesus' face divine;
But cloud, &c.

I could easily set my complaint to Milton's tone, and accompany him through the whole passage, on the subject of a blindness more deplorable than his; but time fails me."

"You ought," he tells Hayley,⁵⁸ "to account it an instance of marvellous grace and favor that I condescend to write even to you. Sometimes I am seriously almost crazed with the multiplicity of the matters before me, and the little or no time that I have for them; and sometimes I repose myself, after the fatigue of that distraction, on the pillow of despair — a pillow which has often served me in the time of need, and is become by frequent use, if not very comfortable, at least convenient. So reposed, I laugh at the world, and say, 'Yes, you may gape and expect both Homer and Milton from me, but I'll be hanged if ever you get them.'"

It was his intention to bring out the second edition of his Homer as soon as possible, for a reason which, he said, any poet may guess, if he will but thrust his hand into his pocket. But he had undertaken the serious task of revising it, with the view of obviating some of the objections which had been made to it. In this he yielded to the opinion of others, in some things against his own judgment. With respect to inversions in particular, which had been said to abound in his translation, and which had been far more frequent in the first copy of his work, most of them having been expunged in deference to Fuseli's criticisms, he consented to remove more, saying, "I know that they give dignity, and am sorry to part with them; but to parody an old proverb, he who lives in the year ninety-three, must do as in the year ninety-three is done by others." So, too, with inharmonious lines, which were not more in number than he accounted indispensably necessary to a due variation of cadence, "I have, however," he says, "now, in conformity with modern taste, (over-much delicate in my mind,) given to a far greater

⁵⁸ March 19.

number of them a flow as smooth as oil. Hereafter they shall not quarrel with me on that score. The Iliad is now all smooth turnpike; and I will take equal care that there shall be no jolts in the Odyssey." But the publisher had expressed a wish for notes, "that the unlearned might be a little illuminated concerning classical story and the mythology of the ancients;" "and his behavior to me," says Cowper, "has been so liberal, that I can refuse him nothing. Poking into the old Greek commentators blinds me. But it is no matter; I am the more like Homer." He breakfasted every morning upon seven or eight pages of these commentators; for so much he was obliged to read, in order to select, perhaps, three or four short notes. No wonder that he found this a more laborious task than the translation, and said that he should be heartily glad when it was over. It was, indeed, an office which might have been just as well performed by deputy, and the time and pains which it cost him were therefore misemployed.

To this he alludes, in a sonnet written upon occasion of Hayley's having proposed to him some plan of literary coöperation.

Dear architect of fine CHATEAUX in air,
 Worthier to stand forever, if they could,
 Than any built of stone, or yet of wood,
 For back of royal elephant to bear;
 O for permission from the skies to share,
 Much to my own, though little to thy good,
 With thee (not subject to the jealous mood)
 A partnership of literary ware!
 But I am bankrupt now; and doomed henceforth
 To drudge, in descant dry, on others' lays;
 Bards, I acknowledge, of unequalled worth;
 But what is commentator's happiest praise?
 That he has furnished lights for other eyes,
 Which they, who need them, use, and then despise.

In stating to his "dear brother bard" the other impediments which could not be comprised within the bounds of a sonnet, he described his own position, and his inability to compose verses unless in solitude. "My poor Mary's infirm condition makes it impossible for me, at present, to engage in a work such as you propose. My thoughts are

not sufficiently free, nor have I, nor can I, by any means, find opportunity. Added to it comes a difficulty, which, though you are not at all aware of it, presents itself to me under a most forbidding appearance: can you guess it? — No, not you; neither perhaps will you be able to imagine that such a difficulty can possibly subsist. If your hair begins to bristle, stroke it down again, for there is no need why it should erect itself. It concerns me, not you. I know myself too well not to know that I am nobody in verse, unless in a corner, and alone, and unconnected in my operations. This is not owing to want of love for you, my brother, or the most consummate confidence in you; for I have both in a degree that has not been exceeded in the experience of any friend you have, or ever had. But I am so made up—I will not enter into a metaphysical analysis of my strange composition, in order to detect the true cause of this evil; but on a general view of the matter, I suspect that it proceeds from that shyness, which has been my effectual and almost fatal hinderance on many other important occasions; and which I should feel, I well know, on this, to a degree that would perfectly cripple me. No! I shall neither do, nor attempt any thing of consequence more, unless my poor Mary get better; nor even then, unless it should please God to give me another nature, in concert with any man. I could not, even with my own father or brother, were they now alive. Small game must serve me at present; and till I have done with Homer and Milton, a sonnet, or some such matter, must content me. The utmost that I aspire to—and Heaven knows with how feeble a hope!—is to write at some better opportunity, and when my hands are free, *The Four Ages*. Thus I have opened my heart unto thee.”

Hayley, upon this, devised a scheme which might be carried into effect, connected with his friend's habit of solitary composition. It was, that each should write a portion of the *Four Ages*; and that the poem, thus composed, should form part of a very ample original confederate work, which they hoped to produce in concert with the united powers of some admirable artists, who were justly dear to

them both. Romney was, unquestionably, one of those artists; Flaxman, perhaps, the other. Cowper was so pleased with this, that he replied,⁶⁰ "My dearest Hayley, if the excessive heat of this day, which forbids me to do any thing else, will permit me to scribble to you, I shall rejoice. To do this is a pleasure to me at all times, but to do it now, a double one; because I am in haste to tell you how much I am delighted with your projected quadruple alliance; and to assure you that if it please God to afford me health, spirits, ability, and leisure, I will not fail to devote them all to the production of my quota of *The Four Ages*.

"You are very kind to humor me as you do, and had need be a little touched yourself with all my oddities, that you may know how to administer to mine. All whom I love do so, and I believe it to be impossible to love heartily those who do not. People must not do me good in *their* way, but in my *own*, and then they do me good indeed. My pride, my ambition, and my friendship for you, and the interest I take in my own dear self, will all be consulted and gratified by an arm-in-arm appearance with you in public; and I shall work with more zeal and assiduity at Homer, and when Homer is finished, at Milton, with the prospect of such a coalition before me."

At this time his spirits appeared to be recovering; and he wrote thus to Teedon:—

DEAR SIR,

Aug. 10, 1793.

You will expect a line from me, and it is fit that you should receive one, though, to say the truth, it is hardly possible for me to find time to send you one. I have no uncommon grievances to complain of. Since I wrote last, my nights have been as quiet as they ever are at the best, and my spirits in the day-time not worse. I will not therefore devote this paper to a recital of melancholy thoughts and experiences. Two nocturnal ones I have had, which I will subjoin, and then conclude. In the first place, I dreamed, about four nights ago, that, walking I know not

⁶⁰ July 7.

where, I suddenly found my thoughts drawn towards God, when I looked upward, and exclaimed —

"I love thee even now more than many who see thee daily."

Whether the dream was from a good source or not, I cannot tell, for it was accompanied with little or no sensation of a spiritual kind.

This morning I had, partly in Latin and partly in Greek —

"Qui adversus seipsum stant, nihili erunt."

I conclude myself in haste, with many thanks for your prayers and kind remembrances, in which we both unite.

Yours sincerely,

WM. COWPER.

A memorandum in the schoolmaster's diary refers to this communication. "Aug. 10, 1793. Received a letter from the Esquire of happier import than any I ever received, on the whole. The Lord grant it may be his harbinger of deliverance!" But this gleam of sunshine was soon overcast. "*Non sum quod simulo*, my dearest brother," he says to Hayley; ⁶¹ "I am cheerful upon paper sometimes, when I am absolutely the most dejected of all creatures. Desirous, however, to gain something myself by my own letters, unprofitable as they may and must be to my friends, I keep melancholy out of them as much as I can, that I may, if possible, by assuming a less gloomy air, deceive myself; and, by feigning with a continuance, improve the fiction into reality."

The next letter to Teedon shows that the hope which he had hitherto placed in that poor man's intercessions and experiences was failing fast. It appears by the commencement as if a certain time had been fixed either by the one or other, and that it had now expired. "Dear sir," he says, ⁶² "the time is come about when I feel myself called upon to say something in acknowledgment of the many prayers you make for us, and the many notices you send

⁶¹ Sept. 8.

⁶² Sept. 13.

me. When I have thanked you for them, I have said all on the subject that is worth saying. For neither the prayers are in any degree answered, nor the notices fulfilled. Of course I continue as I was ; distressed and full of despair. The day hardly ever comes in which I do not utter a wish that I had never been born. And the night is become so habitually a season of dread to me, that I never lie down on my bed with comfort, and am in this respect a greater sufferer than Job, who, concerning his hours of rest, could hope at least, though he was disappointed. I cannot ever hope on that subject, after twenty years' experience, that in my case to go to sleep is to throw myself into the mouth of my enemy.

"Some time since I took laudanum, and found a little relief from that. Now I take James's powders, and from that I find a little relief also. But what is the relief from such remedies worth ? I cannot always take them. After a time they lose their effect, and the effect is trivial while it lasts.

"My pen runs, and I say little to the purpose. Complaints are idle, and only imbitter my spirit more. I will cease, therefore, and add no more than that I remain sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER."

Still he exerted himself as much as it was possible for any person to do in such a state of mind ; indeed no other case has been recorded of such a continued struggle against insanity. He sought relief in employment, in exercise, in improving his garden and orchard, in the society of those whom he loved, whenever it could be obtained,—and sometimes, it appears, whenever his malady did not preclude him from that resource, in prayer. These persevering efforts might perhaps have again availed for a while, as they had formerly done, had it not been for the melancholy spectacle, which was now continually before him, of his dear companion's increasing infirmities of body and of mind. About this time it was that he addressed to her one of the most touching, and certain the most widely known of all his poems ; for it has been read by thousands

and tens of thousands who have never perused the Task, nor perhaps seen or heard of any other of his works. Hayley believed it to be the last original piece which he produced at Weston, and says, he questioned whether any language on earth can exhibit a specimen of verse more exquisitely tender.

TO MARY.

THE twentieth year is well nigh past,
 Since first our sky was overcast ;
 Ah, would that this might be the last,
My Mary !

Thy spirits have a fainter flow ;
 I see thee daily weaker grow ;
 'Twas my distress that brought thee low,
My Mary !

Thy needles, once a shining store,
 For my sake restless heretofore,
 Now rust, disused, and shine no more,
My Mary !

For though thou gladly wouldst fulfil
 The same kind office for me still,
 Thy sight now seconds not thy will,
My Mary !

But well thou play'dst the housewife's part ;
 And all thy threads, with magic art,
 Have wound themselves about this heart,
My Mary !

Thy indistinct expressions seem
 Like language uttered in a dream ;
 Yet me they charm, whate'er the theme,
My Mary !

Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,
 Are still more lovely in my sight
 Than golden beams of orient light,
My Mary !

For, could I view nor them nor thee,
 What sight worth seeing could I see ?
 The sun would rise in vain for me,
My Mary !

Partakers of thy sad decline,
 Thy hands their little force resign;
 Yet, gently pressed, press gently mine,
My Mary!

Such feebleness of limbs thou prov'st,
 That now at every step thou mov'st
 Upheld by two; — yet still thou lov'st,
My Mary!

And still to love, though pressed with ill,
 In wintry age to feel no chill,
 With me is to be lovely still,
My Mary!

But, ah! by constant heed I know,
 How oft the sadness that I show
 Transforms thy smiles to looks of woe,
My Mary!

And should my future lot be cast
 With much resemblance of the past,
 Thy worn-out heart will break at last,
My Mary!

If the society which he loved could have counteracted the coöperating effect of Mrs. Unwin's decline and of his own morbid mind, the latter part of this year might have been the most cheerful autumn that he had passed at Weston. His cousin, of Norfolk, had promised to visit him in October. Hayley was to come and bring with him his son, a boy of extraordinary talents and attainments, of whom Cowper said,⁶³ "If Tom is charmed with the thoughts of coming to Weston, we are equally so with the thoughts of seeing him here. At his years I should hardly hope to make his visit agreeable to him, did I not know that he is of a temper and disposition that must make him happy every where." — "If Romney can come with you," he added, "we have both room to receive him, and hearts to make him most welcome."

Romney could not accept the invitation; and before any of his expected guests arrived, Mr. Rose announced his own coming with Laurence, — "You may guess," said Cowper,⁶⁴ "for what purpose. Yet once more is my

⁶³ Sept. 8.

⁶⁴ Oct. 5.

patience to be exercised ; and once more I am made to wish that my face had been movable, to put on and take off at pleasure, so as to be portable in a band-box, and sent to the artist." Their presence, however, proved a sensible relief to him. "Having company at the house," he writes to Teedon,⁶⁵ "I am amused ; and having been obliged to take laudanum again to quiet my nerves and spirits, somewhat discomposed by their arrival, I have slept more composedly of late, and accordingly have for some days past suffered less from melancholy than I usually do.

"I have thus given you a short account of my present state of mind, and the reasons and causes that have occasioned it. The time I have for writing is short, and will not allow me to add much. I have, however, to observe, what I have observed so often, that for these intervals in which my experience is less painful, I am always indebted to incident, and not to any manifestation of mercy. They are therefore the less valuable, but such as they are I am glad of them, and desire to make the most of them."

And now he again began to think that surely Teedon's constant intercessions would not always be ineffectual. But in the course of a fortnight, he wrote in a more desponding tone,⁶⁶ saying, "Could I feed on the bread which seems to be intended for me, it is so plentifully imparted to you, that I should feel no want ; but I am in the state of Tantalus, surrounded with plenty, and yet famished. If God designed that I should eat, would he not enable me to do so ? This is mysterious, and I cannot solve it. — I dream nothing, hear nothing but from enemies ; never wake without hearing ; but the matter is generally so trivial, if it be not terrible, that it seems spoken only in derision. — In about a month, perhaps in less, I shall begin Milton, and beg your prayers in the mean time on that subject, which always appears formidable to me. I am in a poor condition, both of heart and mind, to write Evangelical Dissertations. A deaf man treating of music !" — Yet he said he had tolerable spirits, owing, as when he wrote last, to company and laudanum. Hayley arrived after Lau-

⁶⁵ Oct. 12.⁶⁶ Oct. 25.

rence had departed ; but he found Johnson there and Rose. Cowper seemed to him — to use his own words — “as well as a very feeling mortal can be, who is watching with affectionate care a life inexpressibly valuable to him, and suspended by a thread so singularly worn, that its duration is wonderful.” An invitation had been brought him by Rose from Lord Spencer, to meet Gibbon at Althorpe, and all his friends pressed him to accept it ; but even if he could have overcome his constitutional shyness, no consideration would have induced him to leave Mrs. Unwin in her infirm and precarious condition. Rose and Hayley therefore carried his apology for declining the invitation, and Hayley returned from this visit to devote himself to Cowper, he says, when his younger guests were departed.

“When two poets meet,” says Cowper,⁶⁷ in a letter to Mrs. Courtenay at this time, “there are fine doings, I can assure you. My Homer finds work for Hayley, and his Life of Milton work for me ; so that we are neither of us one moment idle. Poor Mrs. Unwin, in the mean time, sits quiet in her corner, occasionally laughing at us both, and not seldom interrupting us with some question or remark, for which she is constantly rewarded by me with a ‘Hush ! hold your peace !’ Bless yourself, my dear Catharine, that you are not connected with a poet — especially that you have not two to deal with. Ladies who have may be bidden indeed to hold their peace, but very little peace have they. How should they, in fact, have any, continually enjoined as they are to be silent ? — I write amid a chaos of interruptions. Hayley on one hand spouts Greek, and on the other hand Mrs. Unwin continues talking, sometimes to us, and sometimes, because we are both too busy to attend to her, she holds a dialogue with herself. Query, is not this a bull ? and ought I not instead of dialogue to have said soliloquy ?”

Hayley says that Cowper entreated him to remain the whole winter at Weston, and engage with him in a regular and complete revisal of his Homer ; and that inclination on his part was not wanting, but he thought it possible to render him a more essential service, as he returned through

⁶⁷ Nov. 4.

London, by quickening in the minds of his more powerful friends a seasonable attention to his interest. "My fears for him," he says, "in every point of view, were excited by his present very singular condition. He possessed completely, at this period, all the admirable faculties of his mind, and all his native tenderness of heart; but there was something indescribable in his appearance, which led me to apprehend that, without some signal event in his favor to reanimate his spirits, they would gradually sink into hopeless dejection. The state of his aged, infirm companion afforded additional ground for increasing solicitude. Her cheerful and beneficent spirit could hardly resist her own accumulated maladies, so far as to preserve ability sufficient to watch over the tender health of him whom she had watched and guarded so long. Imbecility of body and mind must gradually render this tender and heroic woman unfit for the charge which she had so laudably sustained. The signs of such imbecility were beginning to be painfully visible; nor can nature present a spectacle more truly pitiable than imbecility in such a shape, eagerly grasping for dominion, which it knows not either how to retain or how to relinquish."

With this intention Hayley left them towards the close of November, after somewhat more than a fortnight's tarryance. Cowper's spirits were immediately afterwards relieved, as regarded Milton, by a letter from Johnson, saying, that he might still postpone his labors. But in other respects the gloom darkened. Telling the schoolmaster that by means of laudanum he had obtained more sleep the last two nights, he adds, "But neither of these nights has passed without some threatenings of that which I fear more than any other thing — the loss of my faithful, long-tried, and only intimate. From whom they come I know not, nor is the time precisely mentioned; but it is always spoken of as near approaching. — Mrs. Unwin has slept her usual time, about five hours, and is this morning as well as usual. As for me, I waked with this line from Comus —

'The wonted roar is up amid the woods;'

consequently I expect to hear it soon."

One more of these melancholy communications, which, like the last, is without a date, I suppose to have been written at this time ; — it is the latest that has been published ; — and indeed the correspondence with Teedon seems very soon afterwards to have ceased. Other illusions, it may be inferred, had passed away for a while when this was written, and one fatal impression for the time possessed him wholly.

DEAR SIR,

Friday Morning.

I am not well, but far from being so. I wake almost constantly under the influence of a nervous fever ; by which my spirits are affected to such a degree that the oppression is almost insupportable. Since I wrote last, I have been plunged in deeps, unvisited, I am convinced, by any human soul but mine ; and though the day in its progress bears away with it some part of this melancholy, I am never cheerful, because I can never hope, and am so bounded in my prospects, that to look forward to another year to me seems madness.

In this state of mind how can I write ? It is in vain to attempt it. I have neither spirits for it, as I have often said, nor leisure. Yet, vain as I know the attempt must prove, I purpose in a few days to renew it.

Mrs. Unwin is as well as when I wrote last, but, like myself, dejected — dejected both on my account and on her own. Unable to amuse herself either with work or reading, she looks forward to a new day with despondence, weary of it before it begins, and longing for the return of night.

Thus it is with us both. If I endeavor to pray, I get my answer in a double portion of misery. My petitions, therefore, are reduced to three words, and those not very often repeated — “ God, have mercy ! ”

Adieu ! Yours,

WM. COWPER.

“ It was a spectacle,” says Hayley, “ that might awaken compassion in the sternest of human characters, to see the health, the comfort, and the little fortune, of a man so dis-

tinguished by intellectual endowments and by moral excellence, perishing most deplorably. A sight so affecting made many friends of Cowper solicitous and importunate, that his declining life should be honorably protected by public munificence. Men of all parties agreed, that a pension might be granted to an author of his acknowledged merit with graceful propriety; and we might apply to him, on this topic, the very expressive words which the poet Claudian addresses, on a different occasion, to his favorite hero:—

*Suffragia vulgi
Jam tibi detulerant, quidquid mox debuit aula.*

“It was devoutly to be wished, that the declining spirits of Cowper should be speedily animated and sustained by assistance of this nature, because the growing influence of melancholy not only filled him with distressing ideas of his own fortune, but threatened to rob him of the power to make any kind of exertion in his own behalf. His situation and his merits were perfectly understood, humanely felt, and honorably acknowledged by persons, who, while they declared that he ought to receive an immediate public support, seemed to possess both the inclination and the power to ensure it. But such is the difficulty of doing real good, experienced even by the great and powerful, or so apt are statesmen to forget the pressing exigence of meritorious individuals in the distractions of official perplexity, that month after month elapsed, in which the intimate friends of Cowper confidently, yet vainly, expected to see him happily rescued from some of the darkest evils impending over him, by an honorable provision for life.

“Imagination can hardly devise any human condition more truly affecting than the state of the poet at this period. His generous and faithful guardian, Mrs. Unwin, who had preserved him through seasons of the severest calamity, was now, with her faculties and fortune impaired, sinking fast into second childhood. The distress of heart that he felt in beholding the cruel change in a companion so justly dear to him, conspiring with his constitutional melancholy, was gradually undermining the exquisite faculties of his mind. But depressed as he was by these complicated

afflictions, Providence was far from deserting this excellent man. His female relation, whose regard he had cultivated as his favorite correspondent, now devoted herself very nobly to the superintendence of a house, whose two interesting inhabitants were rendered, by age and trouble, almost incapable of attending to the ordinary offices of life.

“Those only who have lived with the superannuated and the melancholy, can properly appreciate the value of such magnanimous friendship.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

LADY HESKETH AT WESTON. HAYLEY'S THIRD VISIT. COWPER'S REMOVAL TO NORFOLK. LAST YEARS OF HIS LIFE.

WHEN Lady Hesketh had inquired, in the autumn, at what time her coming would be most convenient, Cowper replied, that since he despaired of ever having her there in the height of summer, which for her own sake he desired most, the depth of winter would be the most eligible season for him; “for then,” said he, “it is that in general I have most need of a cordial, and particularly in the month of January.” She came at the close of November, soon after Hayley's departure, and her intention was to remain till February. Knowing as she did the awful change that had taken place in Mrs. Unwin, and the injurious manner in which he was necessarily affected by it, she thought him, on her arrival, better than she had expected; but in the second week of the month which he always dreaded, his malady returned in full force, and in its worst form.

One of his illusions at this time was that it was his duty to inflict upon himself severe penance for his sins;—such at least is the tradition which Mackintosh¹ and Mr. Basil Montagu heard at Olney seven years afterwards; and this, if it

¹ *Memoirs of Sir J. Mackintosh*, vol. i. p. 156.

were so, was a state of comparative happiness to the more abiding character of his madness ; for in the performance of penance, the belief in a consequent remission of sins is implied. Six days he sate "still and silent as death," and took no other food during that time than a small piece of bread dipped in wine and water. After every attempt to rouse him had failed, his medical attendant suggested, as the only remaining hope, that Mrs. Unwin should indirectly invite him to go out with her, — if she could be induced to do this ; for her state of mind now required almost as much management as his. She, however, perceived the necessity of making the experiment, and observing that it was a fine morning, said she should like to try to walk. Cowper immediately rose, took her by the arm, — and the spell which had fixed him to his chair was broken. This appears to have been the last instance in which her influence over him was exerted for his good.

Towards the end of February his cousin Johnson came from Norfolk, and assisted in attending on him as long as he could be absent from his professional duties. Soon after his departure, Mr. Greatheed thought it necessary to let Hayley know the extent of the evil.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

Newport Pagnel, April 8, 1794.

Lady Hesketh's correspondence acquainted you with the melancholy relapse of our dear friend at Weston ; but I am uncertain whether you know, that in the last fortnight he has refused food of every kind, except now and then a very small piece of toasted bread, dipped generally in water, sometimes mixed with a little wine. This, her ladyship informs me, was the case till last Saturday, since when he has eat a little at each family meal. He persists in refusing such medicines as are indispensable to his state of body. In such circumstances, his long continuance in life cannot be expected. How devoutly to be wished is the alleviation of his danger and distress ! You, dear sir, who know so well the worth of our beloved and admired friend, sympathize with his affliction, and deprecate his loss doubtless

in no ordinary degree ; you have already most effectually expressed and proved the warmth of your friendship. I cannot think that any thing but your society would have been sufficient, during the infirmity under which his mind has long been oppressed, to have supported him against the shock of Mrs. Unwin's paralytic attack. I am certain that nothing else could have prevailed upon him to undertake the journey to Eartham. You have succeeded where his other friends knew they could not, and where they apprehended no one could. How natural, therefore, nay, how reasonable, is it for them to look to you, as most likely to be instrumental, under the blessing of God, for relief in the present distressing and alarming crisis ! It is, indeed, scarcely attemptable to ask any person to take such a journey, and involve himself in so melancholy a scene, with an uncertainty of the desired success ; increased as the apparent difficulty is, by dear Mr. Cowper's aversion to all company, and by poor Mrs. Unwin's mental and bodily infirmities. On these accounts Lady Hesketh dares not ask it of you, rejoiced as she would be at your arrival. Am not I, dear sir, a very presumptuous person, who, in the face of all opposition, dare do this ? I am emboldened by those two powerful supporters, conscience and experience. Was I at Eartham, I would certainly undertake the labor I presume to recommend, for the bare possibility of restoring Mr. Cowper to himself, to his friends, to the public, and to God.

The man who would have hesitated to obey that summons must have had a harder heart than Hayley. Nothing, he says, could be more unseasonable to him in point of personal convenience ; he was even forced to borrow money for the journey.² Cowper, who used to welcome him so

² After stating this in a letter to his wife, he adds, that he was forced also "to bring Jenny as his attendant, having been recently obliged to send poor Mary to London, because she had fallen into a state of mind little superior to that of the dear unhappy Cowper, to whom indeed she has often compared herself for constitutional melancholy." — *Mem. of T. A. Hayley*, p. 83.

If Hayley had paid any regard to appearances, he would not have taken either Mary or Jenny for his attendant. But Hayley was a person "of incoherent transactions," — to borrow an appropriate expression from Angus M'Diarmid, "Ground Officer on the Earl of Breadalbane's estate of Edinample."

warmly, manifested now no pleasure at his arrival ; but, after a few days, he sometimes received medicine and food from his hand, which he would take from no other person. His presence enabled Lady Hesketh to quit what had now become her charge for a few days, that she might consult Dr. Willis, who was then in the highest repute for his skill in such cases, and to whom Thurlow had kindly written, requesting his attention to his unhappy old friend. From his instructions for the regular treatment of the patient, "Lady Hesketh and I," says Hayley,³ "entertain great hopes, embarrassed and thwarted as we perpetually are by the bodily and mental infirmities of poor Mrs. Unwin, who begins, however, (thank Heaven!) to show herself more properly sensible of those efforts of genuine friendship by which I am trying to render the most essential service both to her poor charge and to herself."

Thomas Hayley, after their visit to Weston in the preceding November, had been placed at a private school near Derby, that he might be for a few months near his father's wife, who was as fond of him as if he had been her own child. He was now sent for to Weston, Cowper having "twice spoken in a manner that seemed to indicate a wish to see him;" and when the boy arrived, Cowper did not shrink from him as he did from every one else. But this was all. Nothing could now dispel or even lighten the settled gloom by which he was oppressed. A letter from Lord Spencer arrived at this time, to announce that a pension of three hundred pounds was about to be granted to him by the King ; and he was not in a state either to open the letter, or to be informed by Lady Hesketh of its contents. The pension was rendered payable to Mr. Rose, as his trustee.

"The daily sight," says Hayley, "of a being reduced to such deplorable imbecility as now overwhelmed Mrs. Unwin, was itself sufficient to plunge a tender spirit into extreme melancholy ; yet to separate two friends, so long accustomed to minister with the purest and most vigilant benevolence to the infirmities of each other, was a measure so pregnant with complicated distraction, that it could not

³ To Mrs. Hayley, April 25.

be advised or attempted. It remained only to palliate the sufferings of each in their present most pitiable condition, and to trust in the mercy of that God, who had supported them together through periods of very dark affliction, though not so doubly deplorable as the present.

"I had formerly regarded Weston as a scene that exhibited human nature in a most delightful point of view. I had applauded there no common triumphs of genius and friendship. The contrast that I now contemplated has often led me to repeat (with such feelings as those only who have surveyed a contrast so deplorable can possibly conceive,) the following pathetic exclamation in the *Samson Agonistes* of Milton :

' God of our fathers, what is man ?

Since such as thou hast solemnly elected,
With gifts and graces eminently adorned ;

Yet towards these thus dignified thou oft,
Amidst their height of noon,
Changest thy countenance and thy hand, with no regard
Of highest favors past
From thee on them, or them to thee, of service.

So deal not with this once thy glorious champion !
What do I beg ? How hast thou dealt already !
Behold him in this state calamitous, and turn
His labors, for thou canst, to peaceful end ! "

Though Cowper appeared to derive no comfort from Hayley's presence, nevertheless he manifested extreme unwillingness to let him depart. A few weeks afterward there came a letter from his old friend Mr. Rowley, to congratulate him on his pension, and invite him to Ireland. Lady Hesketh's reply describes his situation faithfully, and explains the circumstances at which Hayley hints.

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ., AT OLD COURT, NEAR
BRAGSHARD, IRELAND.

SIR,

Weston, near Olney, Bucks, May 21, 1794.

Will you permit a person who has not the honor to be known to you, to thank you in the sincerity of a grateful

heart, for your late kind and friendly letter to Mr. Cowper? Had that amiable and interesting sufferer been in a situation to receive or answer letters, yours, sir, dated the fourteenth of this month, would not have fallen into my hands; but though I grieve to give pain to a heart so tender and so friendly as I am convinced by your letter, sir, that yours *must* be, yet I feel myself under the cruel necessity of acquainting you that your friend, and my much-loved cousin, has labored ever since the second week in January under so dreadful a dejection of spirits, that he is utterly incapable of attending to any thing; nor has he ever opened a letter, or suffered one even to be read *to him*, ever since that time!

Truly as I lament the sufferings of this invaluable creature, I cannot *wonder* at them, as the close attendance he has paid to Mrs. Unwin for the last two years, and his unceasing assiduity to her ever since she had her last attack of the palsy, *must* have overcome spirits less tender and susceptible than those of my unhappy cousin. I should inform you, sir, that ever since we settled at Weston, which is now about nine years, I have generally paid him an annual *winter* visit, knowing that to be the season when his nerves and spirits are usually most oppressed; the winter before last, however, being myself ill at Bath, I was prevented attending him as usual, and knowing he would have other friends with him in the spring of 93, I deferred my visit till the middle of November last, when I came here, intending to stay till February. I found this dear soul, on my arrival, the *absolute nurse* of this poor lady, Mrs. Unwin, who cannot move out of her chair without help, nor walk across the room unless supported by two people; added to this, her voice is almost wholly unintelligible, and as their house was repairing all the summer, he was reduced, poor soul! for many months, to have no conversation *but hers*! You must imagine, sir, that his situation was terrible indeed; and the more as he was deprived, by means of this poor lady, of all his wonted exercises, both mental and bodily, as she did not choose he should leave her for a moment, or ever use a pen or a book, except when he read *to her*, which is an employment that always, I know, fatigues and hurts him, and which therefore my arrival relieved him from.

I thought him on the whole better than I expected he would have been in *such a situation*; though rather low at times, and often expressing his fears of the month of January, a season that has more than once been fatal to him, but the effects of which I flattered myself might be kept off by the company of a third person, and one to whom he is *kindly partial*, as you may possibly know, sir, if ever you heard him mention a cousin of the name of *Hesketh*: she it is who has now the honor of writing to you, and of deploring from her inmost heart the unhappy situation of this beloved friend, whom neither the soothings of friendship, nor the exertion of very lively spirits, (which the goodness of Providence still indulges to *me*,) could shield from the dark and absolute *despair* which has for so many months taken entire possession of his charming mind, and totally obscured that brilliant genius, the exertion of which has so often amused and instructed the world.

You will easily believe, sir, that all which the most lively interest and affection could think of for his relief, has been done, or attempted to be done; but in all attempts of this sort, I find a terrible hinderance in the person of the poor old lady above mentioned, who really seems to live only to counteract whatever schemes are planned for his benefit, and the recovery of his health and spirits. I have, however, at last, partly with, and partly without her consent, consulted Doctor Willis on his case, whose character I have long known, and whose brilliant and fortunate success in restoring the health of our beloved sovereign has long made my *loyal* heart his own. Whether even his skill will be able to restore this unhappy man at this distance, I cannot at present say; but earnestly hope it may, as I fear Mrs. Unwin will not consent to his removal there; though from the little I saw of the house, and the manner in which the patients are treated, as well as the liberty they seem to enjoy, I am convinced it would be the *very best place* he could be in, and the one in the which he would be most *likely to be restored*, — the rather, as it would separate him from one who, partly *from the attention which she requires*, and partly from imbecility of mind, occasioned by her *bodily infirmities*, is certainly the *worst companion* he can have at present.

I have thus, sir, informed you as accurately as I am able of our melancholy situation, and can only hope you will not think I have intruded too long upon your patience. I should not certainly have explained myself with so much frankness on this occasion, had I not so often heard my dear unhappy cousin speak of Mr. Rowley in the warmest terms of friendship and affection, and had not your letter, sir, confirmed the kind interest you take in him.

I will now only add, that the late happy and totally unexpected event has given me as much pleasure as I am capable of receiving at such a time as this ; it is, indeed, a double comfort to me, as it seems a sort of omen of his recovery, and I hope I may be allowed to think that God never can have abandoned *him*, whom he has wrought such a *miracle* to preserve ! I cannot help calling it a *miracle*, because, though I always entertained the highest opinion of the goodness and tenderness of heart, both of the King and Mr. Pitt, yet I could never have hoped that at *such a time as this*, when the *public affairs* are sufficiently intricate and embarrassed to engage their whole attention, that the claims of private *merit* and private *distress* should have been allowed to have had a share. But—it is so, and I never can be sufficiently thankful to those good friends who have interested themselves in poor Cowper's behalf, and by whose means his Majesty's favor has been shown in a manner so liberal and benevolent to a creature so *deserving*. He is at present quite ignorant of this happy circumstance, and must remain so, till returning health shall enable him to support and to rejoice at an event which gives independence to his declining years. I cannot conclude without observing, that it reflects double honor both on the *sovereign* and the *minister* to confer favors on an *author* at a time *when they knew* he was incapable of making the *usual* returns. I will now only observe, that my good wishes for my beloved cousin would be *complete*, could I know he was enjoying the place of a friend in the *charming society* you so well describe, and to which you invite him in a manner so kind and so *cordial*.

I have hardly room to say how much I am,

Sir, your most obedient servant,

HARRIET HESKETH.

Dr. Willis, when it had been found that his prescriptions produced no good effect, came to see the patient. It appears to have been his opinion, that more might be hoped from change of air, scene, and circumstances, than from any mode of treatment that could be pursued. But how should two persons be induced to concur in any arrangement for this purpose, when imbecility of mind had produced perverseness in the one, by whose unreasonable will the other was absolutely governed, and when both were alike insensible to all representations, persuasions, and entreaties? Cowper had been urged to leave home in the preceding summer, while his house was undergoing repairs; and the proposition had not displeased him when it was made. He had promised that his first visit should be to Sir John and Lady Throckmorton at Bucklands; and "had I rambled at all," says he,⁴ "I was under promise to all my dear mother's kindred to go to Norfolk, and they are dying to see me; but I have told them that die they must, for I cannot go." "How⁵ to give satisfaction to all, would puzzle me, had I nothing else to do; and therefore the result will probably be, that we shall find ourselves obliged to go no where, since we cannot go every where."

There is a passage in one of his letters, from which it may be inferred that Lady Hesketh at that time had thought it advisable for him to remove, and settle near his maternal relations; for he says to her,⁶ "It is in vain that thou counselest me to leave Weston for Norfolk. Kinder friends than I have here in the Courtenays, I could not find even there; and this is, moreover, of all the earth, the spot that delights me most." In the spring of 1795, his cousin Johnson thought that perhaps a summer's residence by the sea-side might restore his poor kinsman; could he be removed therefore into Norfolk for a few months, Lady Hesketh would have time for recruiting herself after the fatigue and anxiety of the last eighteen months, and toward the close of the year he hoped the inhabitants of the Lodge might reassemble there in amended health and spirits. When he informed Lady Hesketh of this plan, she desired

⁴ To Hayley, March 19, 1793.

⁵ To Mr. Greatheed, July 17, 1793.

⁶ June 30, 1793.

him not to write till all his own affairs were settled, and till he had got the joint assent ("I fear," said she,⁷ "I must not say the *cheerful* assent) of all parties. At present you assure me you are really fixed and steady; and I am determined to believe you, and even to do more — to thank you very sincerely for the plan you have laid to convenience me by allowing me so many holidays. — You say that a huge, black, heavy cloud was hanging over you at the time you wrote. Ah, Johnny! I do indeed believe that the cloud that hung over you damped your spirits, and this though possibly the atmosphere was as clear at the time you wrote as it is at this moment; but the cloud that sunk your spirits was the visit you so kindly promised to the Lodge.

"One thing, however," she continues, "*I must desire*, that if you keep up any correspondence in this house, besides me, you will on no account mention or give the most distant hint of your intended visit here, at least not of the *occasion* of it. That you may have thoughts of coming here in the course of the summer, I should not object to their knowing, and have indeed hinted, some time ago, the possibility of such a thing to our cousin, with which he rather seemed pleased; but I wish not that the *family* or *Madame* should suspect it; if she did, she might hit upon some plans that might not be pleasant either to you or me; therefore the less that is said will be the best. You may depend, however, that I will take care they shall both know of your coming; and that you shall not take them by surprise, as last summer, seeing I have now found out our dear cousin likes to be told of whatever he is to expect; and I am sure he will be more glad to see you than any body. But it grieves me to say he is very bad indeed, — scarce eats any thing! — is worn to a shadow! and has totally given up all his little avocations, such as netting, putting maps together, playing with the solitary board, &c. &c., with which we contrived to while away the winter more tolerably than I had any reason to expect. He now does nothing but walk *incessantly* backwards and forwards, either in his study or his bed-chamber. He really does not sometimes sit down for more than half an hour the whole day,

⁷ May 5.

except at meal-times, when, as I before said, he takes hardly *any thing*. He has left off bathing his feet, will take no laudanum, and lives in a constant state of terror that is dreadful to behold! He is now come to expect daily, and even *hourly*, that he shall be carried away;—and kept in his room from the time breakfast was over till four o'clock on Sunday last, in spite of repeated messages from *Madame*, because he was afraid somebody would take possession of his bed, and prevent his lying down on it any more!

“I mention these things, dear Johnny, not to frighten or grieve you, but simply to show you how bad the dear soul is! I wrote last week to Dr. Willis for the first time since September last, informed him how much better he had seemed all the winter, and how rapidly his malady had increased within these few weeks. I told the doctor, what I do indeed think, that he has *no chance*, either for *health* or *life*, but by passing some time under his care; and though I know no more than I did last year *how* this can be effected, I have yet desired him to inform me whether he has, or shall have in the course of the summer, room for this unhappy, interesting creature under his own roof. The expense of this will, I know, be very great, but I will with pleasure do all in my power to make this easy to him. Of his pension he has not received one farthing, nor is likely to do so before next winter; and Hannah’s amazing extravagance has not cost less than one hundred and fifty pounds since last July! What can become of our poor cousin, *sick* or *well*, if she is to go on in this manner, I cannot guess. All in my power I have done to put some stop to such shameful proceedings, but in vain: the boarding school has *finished* what Mrs. Unwin’s absurd, unpardonable indulgence had begun; and what is to become of her I know not! She literally does nothing but walk about, and dress herself, and write love-letters. If you saw her sweep the village with muslin dresses of twelve shillings a yard, and feathers a yard long, you would really think it was some duchess. I have told her that the daughter of a man of five thousand pounds a year would not be allowed to dress as she does; and when one considers that all this finery is to dine in the *kitchen*, it makes one sick. She certainly looks very elegant and showy, and as Mrs.

Unwin does not restrain her, I wonder not at the girl. I have found out that once, when she was very ill, she engaged Mr. Cowper to take care and provide for her; but how he is to do it I am sure I know not. All he is worth in the world would not half keep Hannah, taking finery and idleness into the account, for she puts out all her clothes and linen to be *mended* as well as *made*. I am sure she is a singular instance of foolish fondness; and now Mrs. Unwin lies in bed till past one, this girl never attends her in her room, or does the least thing for her in return for all her indulgence! — But I will say no more, as the subject is really painful to

Yours sincerely,

H. H.

“I understand from Mr. Rose that he expected you in town to christen my godson, his little Cowper. Can I find room to tell you Mrs. Unwin had another attack the seventeenth of last month? It affected her face and voice only. She is a dreadful spectacle; yet within these two days she has made our wretched cousin drag her round the garden; though even Samuel can scarce support her. You would have a great treat if you were here now, as I am ranging and putting into books letters of our cousin's to me from the year 85 to 93, and often wish for you to help me.”

It was not only desirable that the effect of change should be tried for Cowper's sake, but it was also necessary that some effectual steps should be taken for altering an establishment which was conducted with such reckless improvidence while Mrs. Unwin continued nominally at its head. Mr. Johnson, however, when he arrived at the Lodge in July, had no intention of proposing a final removal; but he probably contemplated a longer absence for them when he succeeded in the difficult task of persuading Cowper and Mrs. Unwin to return with him, than had originally been intended. “It was a singularly happy circumstance,” he says,⁸ “that in this projected departure from

⁸ Sketch of the Life of Cowper, p. lvi.

his beloved Weston, neither Cowper nor Mrs. Unwin, nor either of their friends, thought of any thing further than a temporary absence. For had the measure been suggested under the idea of a final separation from that endeared residence, (which was eventually found to have been the intention of Providence,) the anguish of Cowper in passing for the last time over the threshold of his favorite retirement, and in taking leave of Lady Hesketh forever, might not only have proved fatal to the delicate health of his affectionate relative, but have so extended itself to the breast of his conductor, as to have deprived him of the necessary fortitude for sustaining so long a journey with so helpless a charge." No definite plan indeed could be formed for two persons who were both in such a state of mind as to render it not improbable that if they began the journey, they might insist upon turning back. But Cowper had a presentiment that he should never return; and on a panel of the window-shutter in his bed-chamber, unknown to any person at the time, he wrote these lines:

Farewell, dear scenes, forever closed to me;
O, for what sorrows must I now exchange ye!⁹

⁹ I am obliged for these lines, in the first instance, to Mr. Burges: he informed me that a friend of his, who resided in that neighborhood, and whose father was well acquainted with Cowper, had occasion to visit Weston early in 1833; and going over Cowper's house to see it *in statu quo*, for the last time, as a farmer who had just taken possession of the place was in the act of painting and whitewashing the rooms, he found them, written in pencil, and immediately recognized the hand-writing.

A subsequent communication from the Rev. Josiah Bull (to whom I have many obligations) authenticates them, and adds the following circumstance, explanatory of the two dates, which are written under the verses, thus:

July 22.
— 28, 1795.

"The couplet is written on the panel of the window-shutter, and the room overlooked his garden, and commands a partial view of those scenes which were so interesting to him. The lines are the more touching as being singularly prophetic of his unhappy state of mind during the period subsequent to his leaving Weston. That I might obtain an accurate copy of them, I rode over to Weston yesterday, and was fortunate enough to meet with a person who gave me some information which verifies their origin, and accounts for their preservation for forty years. This individual, whose name is Price, tells me that he assisted in packing Mr. Cowper's goods, and that he and

How difficult it was to effect this movement, and how uncertain that it would be effected till the very last, may be understood from a letter which Lady Hesketh began to Mr. Johnson on the evening of the day after their departure.

Weston, Wednesday Evening, July 29, 1795.

MY DEAR SIR JOHN,

Here I am, lost in wonder and astonishment at your matchless generalship, and the uncommonly successful manner in which you carried all your points,—all at least that have come to my knowledge; and as your caravan is not returned to this place, (which, I promise you, I expected without ceasing the whole of yesterday,) you certainly keep *going on*; that is undoubted; and our dear, much-loved, and most unhappy cousin will actually tomorrow find himself in Norfolk! that El Dorado which the dear soul thought so utterly impossible for him ever to attain. O, my good Johnny, what an astonishment did you leave me in, and in what perfect astonishment have I lived ever since!"

Care had been taken that when they reached Bedford a relay of horses should be ready on the skirts of the town, so that they passed through without stopping. "On the evening of the first day," says his kinsman, "the quiet village of St. Neots, near Eaton, afforded as convenient a resting-place for the party as could have been desired; and the peaceful moonlight scenery of the spot, as Cowper walked with his kinsman up and down the churchyard, had so favorable an effect on his spirits, that he conversed with him with much composure on the subject of Thomson's Seasons, and the circumstances under which they were

others saw the lines after he had left. He accounted for the second date by the circumstance that Mr. Cowper did not leave Weston on the day he expected, but not until nearly a week from that time. Price himself afterwards occupied the house, and says that for twenty years that very shutter was closed up to avoid the tax. It seems that it was afterwards opened; but two years ago, when the present occupant came to the house, he found it again closed. This probably accounts for the preservation of the writing. It has been unfortunately retraced, but is evidently the fair and distinct hand of the poet. There is a word before the second date, but I am unable to read it."

probably written." Nothing that might be at all compared with "this gleam of cheerfulness with which it pleased God to visit the afflicted poet at the commencement of his journey" was ever again exhibited in his countenance; yet Mr. Johnson says it was a subject of grateful remembrance to him, "for though it vanished from the breast of Cowper, like the dew of the morning, it preserved the sunshine of hope in his own mind as to the final recovery of his revered relation; and that cheering hope never forsook him till the object of his incessant care was sinking into the valley of the shadow of death." St. Neot's churchyard will be visited by many a traveller for Cowper's sake; it was there, and by moonlight, that he saw for the last time the River Ouse.

The same care had been taken to provide horses at Cambridge as at Bedford. They passed the second night at Barton Mills, which, being a solitary place, was for them a convenient one; and on the third day they reached the village of North Tuddenham, their journey's end. There, "by the kindness of the Rev. Leonard Shelford, they were comfortably accommodated with an untenanted parsonage-house, in which they were received by Miss Johnson and Miss Perowne; the residence of their conductor, in the market-place of East Dereham, being thought unfavorable to the tender spirit of Cowper.

Lady Hesketh finished her letter from her house in London, having heard from their "conductor," that they were proceeding well on their journey, and anticipating that it was safely completed.

N. Norfolk Street. Saturday. Ten O'Clock. Aug. 1.

The upper part of this letter was written, as you will perceive, my dear, delightful General, while I remained at Weston, and while I was filled with anxiety for the success of your wonderful enterprise. That anxiety — blessed be God for it! — your welcome letter of yesterday has entirely removed; for I cannot help prognosticating every thing happy and delightful from a journey which has begun so well; so much better indeed than could have been hoped or imagined; though I always was of opinion that nothing

On earth was so likely to remove our beloved friend's malady, as change of air, and an entire new scene. Dr. Willis said the same thing last year; but how to bring it about was the question; and I must honestly confess that I never should have had the ingenuity to have planned, or the courage to have executed, the scheme you so nobly undertook, and have, I doubt not, by this time, my Johnny, so happily executed. But you, my Johnny, could alone have formed an idea of taking *Madame* as part of your travelling equipage; and but for that, our poor friend would still have remained a miserable captive; nor would she ever have allowed him to have strayed beyond the walls of his prison-house, had not your friendly heart inspired you with the happy idea of making her the partner of his flight. I wonder not to find that even she has received benefit by this expedition.

I must now tell you that the joyful news contained in your letter agitated my spirits so much that it was with the greatest difficulty I scratched a very few lines to Mrs. Courtenay and Mr. Greatheed, the latter of whom met me when I stopped to change horses at Newport Pagnel, and to whom I gave so bad an account of your dear fellow-traveller, that he, I am sure, will be transported with joy at the blessed account he will receive this day — as unexpected to him as to myself. And now, my dear Johnny, let me say that you appear evidently to me to be an instrument in the hands of a good Providence, to work out comfort, and to be the means of happiness to our hitherto wretched friend. There is something so completely astonishing in what you have done, and there was so little likelihood that your well-concerted plan should yet ever be brought to bear, that I cannot but consider you as being inspired from above to do what you have done. I will only say, that in return, my dear good young friend, there is no good, no blessing, either temporal or spiritual, that I do not wish from my inmost soul may be the portion of you and yours to all eternity.

I cleared out the desk as well as I could, ranged the papers, and put it into your box, together with the Homer, the Miltons, and all the papers that I thought might be

useful to our dear cousin. I then had the box *screwed down like a coffin*, lest, as it is heavy, and a lock only in the middle, it might chance to burst. I left ample directions that that box, and the box which contains Miss Johnson's cap, should go by the wagon on Thursday last. The key I have sealed up and given to Susie, who will bring it with her. If our dear cousin should go on as he has begun, I think he will some little time hence be glad to see his old friends, the desk, &c. May it please a gracious Providence to enable him, ere long, to make use of it for his own benefit, and that of the world, prays

Your most obliged and delighted

H. HESKETH.

Be not afraid of wanting money. A quarter of the pension will be paid in a day or two; and you may draw on me, or I will send you a draft for any sum you please; but say not a word to Mrs. U.

These letters show how unhappily Mrs. Unwin's disposition had changed as her mind and body became more and more debilitated; and how necessary it was that some decisive measure should be taken for delivering Cowper from his bondage. The removal was the only course that could have been pursued with any reasonable hope either of present relief or of eventual recovery. The first object was accomplished by bringing his poor companion into a situation where she was no longer mistress of the establishment, and consequently ceased to expect that every thing should be directed according to her own will. That will had ever been subservient to his, while she was of sound mind; it became selfish only when she could no longer be considered as morally and religiously responsible. And deeply as Cowper was indebted to his kinsman Johnson, during the latter years of his life, he was for nothing more so than for having placed Mrs. Unwin in circumstances where that diseased propensity was effectually checked; where, instead of being regarded, by his friends, with feelings of displeasure for his sake, she again became to them an object of respect and tenderness, and where he,

without utterly sacrificing his health and those pursuits on which that health so greatly depended, could still affectionately discharge the debt of gratitude that he owed her.

As the time of the year was favorable, and Cowper was capable of taking considerable exercise, Mr. Johnson took many walks with him in the retired neighborhood of Tuddenhams. In one of these they reached the house of his cousin, Mrs. Bodham, at Mattishall. At the sight of his own portrait by Abbot, he clasped his hands passionately, and uttered a vehement wish that his feelings were, or could again be, such as they were when that picture was painted.

In August, hoping that both the invalids might derive some benefit from sea air, Mr. Johnson took them to the village of Mundesley,¹⁰ on the Norfolk coast. Cowper, in his better days, had taken great delight in walking on the shore. "I think with you," he says, in a letter to Mr. Unwin,¹¹ "that the most magnificent object under heaven is the great deep; and cannot but feel an unpolite species of astonishment when I consider the multitudes that view it without emotion, and even without reflection. In all its various forms, it is an object of all others the most suited to affect us with lasting impressions of the awful Power that created and controls it. I am the less inclined to think this negligence excusable, because, at a time of life when I gave as little attention to religious subjects as almost any man, I yet remember that the waves could preach to me, and that, in the midst of dissipation, I had an ear to hear them. One of Shakspeare's characters says, 'I am never merry when I hear sweet music.' The same effect that harmony seems to have had upon him, I have experienced from the sight and sound of the ocean, which have often composed my thoughts into a melancholy, not displeasing, nor without its use."

Mundesley was a place at which Cowper had been in his youth, when he visited his maternal relations. The

¹⁰ "Where, some years ago," says Gibson, in his additions to Camden, "at a cliff were taken up some large bones, (thought to be of a monster,) which were petrified."

¹¹ Sept. 26, 1781.

pleasure which he had then felt never could return ; but to the solemn effect which the waves produced he was still able to surrender himself ; and they had not been there long before Mr. Johnson perceived that there was something inexpressibly soothing to Cowper in the monotonous sound of the breakers ; and this, he says, “ induced him to confine the walks of the poet, whom dejection precluded from the exercise of all choice whatever, or at least the expression of it, almost wholly to the sands, which at Mundsley are remarkably firm and level.”

From this place Cowper began the last series of his letters to Lady Hesketh. They begin gloomily, and grow darker and darker to their close.

TO LADY HESKETH, CHELTENHAM, GLOCESTERSHIRE.

Mundesley, near North Walsham, Aug. 27, 1795.

Hopeless as ever, and chiefly to gratify myself by once more setting pen to paper, I address a very few lines to one whom it would be a comfort to me to gratify as much by sending them. The most forlorn of beings, I tread a shore under the burden of infinite despair, that I once trod all cheerfulness and joy. I view every vessel that approaches the coast with an eye of jealousy and fear, lest it arrive with a commission to seize me. But my insensibility, which you say is a mystery to you, because it seems incompatible with such fear, has the effect of courage, and enables me to go forth, as if on purpose to place myself in the way of danger. The cliff is here of a height that it is terrible to look down from ; and yesterday evening, by moonlight, I passed sometimes within a foot of the edge of it, from which to have fallen would probably have been to be dashed in pieces. But though to have been dashed in pieces would perhaps have been best for me, I shrunk from the precipice, and am waiting to be dashed in pieces by other means. At two miles' distance on the coast is a solitary pillar of rock, that the crumbling cliff has left at the high-water mark. I have visited it twice, and have found it an emblem of myself. Torn from my natural connections, I stand alone and expect the storm that shall displace me.

I have no expectation that I shall ever see you more, though Samuel assures me that I shall visit Weston again, and that you will meet me there. My terrors, when I left it, would not permit me to say, Farewell forever — which now I do; wishing, but vainly wishing, to see you yet once more, and equally wishing that I could now as confidently, and as warmly as once I could, subscribe myself affectionately yours; but every feeling that would warrant the doing it, has, as you too well know, long since forsaken the bosom of

W. C.

Mr. Johnson is gone to North Walsham, and knows not that I write.

Mrs. Unwin sends her affectionate respects and compliments.

Soon afterwards he wrote the following letter to Mr. Buchanan. "It shows," says Hayley, "the severity of his depression; but shows also that faint gleams of pleasure could occasionally break through the settled darkness of melancholy." He began with a quotation:

"To interpose a little ease,
Let my frail thoughts dally with false surmise."

"I will forget for a moment, that to whomsoever I may address myself, a letter from me can no otherwise be welcome, than as a curiosity. To you, sir, I address this; urged to it by extreme penury of employment, and the desire I feel to learn something of what is doing, and has been done at Weston (my beloved Weston!) since I left it.

"The coldness of these blasts, even in the hottest days, has been such, that, added to the irritation of the salt spray with which they are always charged, they have occasioned me an inflammation in the eyelids, which threatened a few days since to confine me entirely; but by absenting myself as much as possible from the beach, and guarding my face with an umbrella, that inconvenience is in some degree abated. My chamber commands a very near view of the ocean, and the ships at high water approach the coast so

closely, that a man furnished with better eyes than mine might, I doubt not, discern the sailors from the window. No situation, at least when the weather is clear and bright, can be pleasanter; which you will easily credit, when I add that it imparts something a little resembling pleasure even to me. — Gratify me with news from Weston! If Mr. Gregson, and your neighbors the Courtenays, are there, mention me to them in such terms as you see good. Tell me if my poor birds are living. I never see the herbs I used to give them without a recollection of them, and sometimes am ready to gather them, forgetting that I am not at home. Pardon this intrusion!

“Mrs. Unwin continues much as usual.

“*Mundsley, Sept. 5, 1795.*”

Mr. Johnson's hopes were “greatly elevated by the unexpected despatch of this epistle, which he hailed, he says, as the forerunner of many more, each contributing something to the alleviation of his melancholy.” It appears therefore that Cowper had not informed him of his having written to Lady Hesketh; and indeed the next letter¹² to his cousin implies that, with a feeling common to persons in his state, he thought fit to write to her secretly, and supposed himself to be no longer master of his own actions.

TO LADY HESKETH, CHELTENHAM.

Mr. Johnson is again absent; gone to Mattishall — a circumstance to which I am indebted for an opportunity to answer your letter as soon almost as I have received it. Were he present, I feel that I could not do it. You say it gives you pleasure to hear from me, and I resolve to forget for a moment my conviction that it is impossible for me to give pleasure to any body. You have heard much from my lips that I am sure has given you none; if what comes from my pen be less unpalatable, none has therefore so strong a claim to it as yourself.

My walks on the sea-shore have been paid for by

¹² The letter is without date, but marked by Lady Hesketh as the second of the series.

swelled and inflamed eyelids, and I now recollect that such was always the condition of mine in the same situation—a natural effect, I suppose, at least upon eyelids so subject to disorder as mine, of the salt spray and cold winds which on the coast are hardly ever less than violent. I now therefore abandon my favorite walk, and wander in lanes and under hedges. As heavy a price I have paid for a long journey, performed on foot to a place called Hazeborough. That day was indeed a day spent in walking. I was much averse to the journey, both on account of the distance and the uncertainty of what I should find there; but Mr. Johnson insisted. We set out accordingly, and I was almost ready to sink with fatigue long before we reached the place of our destination. The only inn was full of company; but my companion having an opportunity to borrow a lodging for an hour or two, he did so, and thither we retired. We learned, on inquiry, that the place is eight miles distant from this; and though, by the help of a guide, we shortened it about a mile in our return, the length of the way occasioned me a fever, which I have had now these four days, and perhaps shall not be rid of in four more; perhaps never. Mr. J. and Samuel, after dinner, visited the light-house—a gratification which would have been none to me for several reasons, but especially because I found no need to add to the number of steps I had to take before I should find myself at home again. I learned, however, from them, that it is a curious structure. The building is circular, but the stairs are not so, flight above flight, with a commodious landing at every twentieth stair, they ascend to the height of four stories; and there is a spacious and handsome apartment at every landing. The light is given by the patent lamp, of which there are two ranges; six lamps in the upper range, and five in the lower; both ranges, as you may suppose, at the top of the house. Each lamp has a broad silver reflector behind it. The present occupant was once commander of a large merchantman, but, having chastised a boy of his crew with too much severity, was displaced, and consequently ruined. He had, however, a friend in the Trinity-House, who, soon after this was built,

asked him if he would accept the charge of it ; and the cashiered captain, judging it better to be such a lamp-lighter than to starve, very readily and very wisely closed with the offer. He has only the trouble of scouring the silver plates every day, and of rising every night at twelve to trim the lamps, for which he has a competent salary, (Samuel forgets the amount of it,) and he and his family a pleasant and comfortable abode.

I have said as little of myself as I could, that my letter might be more worth the postage. My next will perhaps be less worth it, should any next ensue ; for I meet with little variety, and shall not be very willing to travel fifteen miles on foot again, to find it. I have seen no fish since I came here, except a dead sprat upon the sands, and one piece of cod from Norwich, too stale to be eaten. Adieu.

W. C.

Mr. Johnson had found, that, "shattered as Cowper's frame was, and reduced even to a consumptive thinness, it yet retained a considerable portion of muscular strength." When they had explored all the walks within reach of Mundsley, they made a journey of fifty miles, by way of Cromer, Holt, and Fakenham, to look at Dunham Lodge, a house then vacant, standing on high ground in the neighborhood of Swaffham. Cowper observed that it was rather too spacious for his requirements ; but Mr. Johnson thought that he did not seem unwilling to inhabit it ; and as he thought also that the situation would be more suitable for him than his own house in the market-place at East Dereham, he determined to treat for it. They returned by a different route to Mundsley, "the health, if not the spirits, of Cowper having been benefited by this journey, though Mrs. Unwin's infirmities continued the same." Mr. Johnson was probably absent in preparing for their removal to Dunham Lodge, when Cowper, who at this time communicated none of his wishes here, supposed him to be gone, whither he himself would fain have returned, to Weston. That feeling he expressed with bitter sorrow to Lady Hesketh.

TO LADY HESKETH, CHELTENHAM.

Mundestly, Sept. 26, 1795.

Mr. Johnson is gone forth again ; and again, for the last time I suppose that I shall ever do it, I address a line to you. I knew not of his intentions to leave me till the day before he did so. Like every thing else that constitutes my wretched lot, this departure of his was sudden, and shocked me accordingly. He enjoined me, before he went, if I wrote at all in his absence, to write to Mr. Newton ; but I cannot, and so I told him. Whither he is gone I know not ; at least I know not by information from himself. Samuel tells me that he thinks his destination is to Weston ; but why to Weston is unimaginable to me. I shall never see Weston more. I have been tossed like a ball into a far country, from which there is no rebound for me. There indeed I lived a life of infinite despair, and such is my life in Norfolk. Such indeed it would be in any given spot upon the face of the globe ; but to have passed the little time that remained to me there, was the desire of my heart. My heart's desire, however, has been always frustrated in every thing that it ever settled on, and by means that have made my disappointments inevitable. When I left Weston, I despaired of reaching Norfolk, and now that I have reached Norfolk, I am equally hopeless of ever reaching Weston more. What a lot is mine ! Why was existence given to a creature that might possibly, and would probably, become wretched in the degree that I have been so ? and whom misery, such as mine, was almost sure to overwhelm in a moment. But the question is vain. I existed by a decree from which there was no appeal, and on terms the most tremendous, because unknown to, and even unsuspected by me ; difficult to be complied with had they been foreknown, and unforeknown, impracticable. Of this truth I have no witness but my own experience ; a witness whose testimony will not be admitted. But farewell to a subject with which I can only weary you, and blot the paper to no purpose.

You assure me that I shall see you again : tell me where and when I shall see you, and I will believe you if it be possible.

Samuel desires me to present his duty to you. His wife is gone to Weston, and he wishes me to say that if Mrs. Herbert has any concerns there that Nanny can settle for her, and will give her the necessary directions, she may depend upon their being exactly attended to. With Mrs. Unwin's respects, I remain the forlorn and miserable being I was when I wrote last.

W. C.

In the course of October, Mr. Johnson removed his charge to DUNHAM LODGE, as their settled residence. He had hoped that Cowper's letter to Mr. Buchanan might be the means of engaging him in a correspondence, and thus gradually lead him to resume those employments which heretofore had always seemed to suspend his malady. But though Mr. Buchanan, in his reply, endeavored to invite this, it was without success. As winter approached, walking, it is said, was rendered impracticable, probably because, while his eyes were affected, the cold winds of Norfolk confined him to the house as much as the miry ways about Olney had done in former years. He would neither write nor read at any time; but he was willing to listen as long as his kinsman would read to him. The only books, however, which appeared to interest him, were "works of fiction;" and "so happy," says Mr. Johnson, "was the influence of these in riveting his attention, that he discovered peculiar satisfaction when any one of more than ordinary length was introduced." As soon as this was perceived, Richardson's novels were procured; and he heard them with more pleasure because he had been personally acquainted with the author; perhaps, too, because there may be more satisfaction in re-perusing a good book after an interval of many years, than is felt in reading it for the first time.

Mr. Johnson thought that these readings abstracted Cowper from the contemplation of his own misery; and this effect might be produced in a considerable degree, even if he were as totally incapable of listening with any continuous attention, as he described himself in his next letter to Lady Hesketh.

TO THE LADY HESKETH, BATH.

Jan. 22, 1796.

I little thought ever to have addressed you by letter more. I have become daily and hourly worse, ever since I left Mundsley: there I had something like a gleam of hope allowed me, that possibly my life might be granted me for a longer time than I had been used to suppose, though only on the dreadful terms of accumulating future misery on myself, and for no other reason; but even that hope has long since forsaken me, and I now consider this letter as the warrant of my own dreadful end; as the fulfilment of a word heard in better days, at least six-and-twenty years ago—a word which to have understood at the time when it reached me, would have been, at least might have been, a happiness indeed to me; but my cruel destiny denied me the privilege of understanding any thing that, in the horrible moment that came winged with my immediate destruction, might have served to aid me. You know my story far better than I am able to relate it. Infinite despair is a sad prompter. I expect that in six days' time, at the latest, I shall no longer foresee, but feel the accomplishment of all my fears. O, lot of unexampled misery incurred in a moment! O wretch! to whom death and life are alike impossible! Most miserable at present in this, that being thus miserable I have my senses continued to me, only that I may look forward to the worst. It is certain, at least, that I have them for no other purpose, and but very imperfectly even for this. My thoughts are like loose and dry sand, which, the closer it is grasped, slips the sooner away. Mr. Johnson reads to me, but I lose every other sentence through the inevitable wanderings of my mind, and experience, as I have these two years, the same shattered mode of thinking on every subject, and on all occasions. If I seem to write with more connection, it is only because the gaps do not appear.

Adieu. — I shall not be here to receive your answer, neither shall I ever see you more. Such is the expectation of the most desperate and most miserable of all beings.

W. C.

In this miserable letter he alludes to his old illusion of audible revelations, and to a notion which possessed him now, that he should never die, but was speedily to be carried away in the body to some place of torment. I have already observed that such notions as the latter, affect the insane person who expresses them no more than if he were in a dream ; probably not so much. The former was not an "unreal mockery : " the words which occurred to him on waking, though but his own imaginations, were organically heard ; and Mr. Johnson, perceiving how fully he was impressed with a belief in their reality, ventured upon a questionable experiment. He introduced a tube into his chamber, near the bed's head, and employed one with whose voice Cowper was not acquainted, to speak words of comfort through this conveyance. The hazardous artifice was never discovered, and is not likely to have had any more effect than had been produced by Teedon's communications. It may be surmised from the following letter, that it was attempted by this means to encourage him to resume his employments.

TO THE LADY HESKETH, BATH.

February 19, 1796.

Could I address you as I used to do, with what delight should I begin this letter ! But that delight, and every other sensation of the kind, has long since forsaken me forever. The consequence is, that I neither know for what cause I write, nor of what materials to compose what shall be written ; my groans, could they be expressed here, would presently fill the paper. I write, however, at the instance of Mr. Johnson, and, as I always think, so always on the last occasion more assuredly than on any of the former, for the very last time. He, I know, inquired in a letter he lately sent you, when we might expect you here. Whatever day you name in your reply, will be a day that I shall never see ; nor have I even the hope, unless it come tomorrow, that your reply itself will reach this place before I am taken from it. The uncertainty is dreadful, and all remedy for it impracticable. But why tell you what I

think of myself, of my present condition, and of the means employed to reduce me to it? My thoughts on all these subjects are too well known to you to need any recital here. All my themes of misery may be summed in one word, — He who made me regrets that ever he did. Many years have passed since I learned this terrible truth from Himself, and the interval has been spent accordingly. Adieu! — I shall write to you no more. I am promised months of continuance here, and should be somewhat less a wretch in my present feelings, could I credit the promise, but effectual care is taken that I shall not. The night contradicts the day, and I go down the torrent of time into the gulf that I have expected to plunge into so long. A few hours remain, but among those few not one is found, a part of which I shall ever employ in writing to you again. Once more therefore adieu — and adieu to the pen forever! I suppress a thousand agonies to add only

W. C.

Mr. Johnson says he shall expect me to resume the pen and my former employments on Tuesday se'nnight. But what I have written here, on my re-perusal of it, convinces me, as it may him, that it will be in vain. Some other dreadful thing will happen to me, and not the desirable one announced.

Lady Hesketh alludes to this letter when writing to Mr. Johnson.¹³ "It grieves me," says she, "to find our beloved friend is still so miserable in his mind, and so full of those dreadful apprehensions. But still I cannot think you did wrong to fix a day for his beginning his old occupations again. I think it the less, because, in the dear soul's last letter to me, he says that you have told him that on *such a day* he shall do so, but that he is convinced it will be vain, and that instead of that, something dreadful will take place and prevent it. I mean to write to this dear creature by this post, if I can, and will then remind him, as I have often done before, that the period he dreaded with so little reason is past; and if you was as good as your word, and did

¹³ March 13, 1796.

really put his books and papers before him, on the day you promised, it would serve, I should hope, to show him that *you* have kept your word, and that his abominable whisperers never do ; by which the unhappy man may possibly be brought to think that which is most true, that *they never will.*"

"At this time," says Mr. Johnson, "the tender spirit of Cowper clung exceedingly to those about him, and seemed to be haunted with a continual dread that they would leave him alone in his solitary mansion. Sunday, therefore, was a day of more than ordinary apprehension to him, as the furthest of his kinsman's churches being fifteen miles from the Lodge, he was necessarily absent during the whole of the Sabbath. On these occasions it was the constant practice of the dejected poet to listen frequently on the steps of the hall-door for the barking of dogs at a farm-house, which, in the stillness of the night, though at nearly the distance of two miles, invariably announced the approach of his companion."

Dunham Lodge being thus found (as might have been foreseen) an inconvenient place of abode, Mr. Johnson looked out for a house equally retired, but nearer the scene of his ministerial duties. The inquiry was unsuccessful: he then ventured to ask Cowper whether he should object to reside in Dereham, and to his surprise it appeared that "he not only preferred it to his present situation, but, if the question had been put to him in the first instance, would never have wished to reside any where else. It was agreed, therefore, that they should remain where they were only till they went to Mundsley for the summer, and that when they left the coast, they should establish themselves at Dereham.

Meantime the weary hours of hopeless inactivity were beguiled by taking him out when the weather permitted, either to walk, or in an open carriage, and by reading novels, to which he seemed to listen with increased interest. In April, Mr. and Mrs. Powley came from Yorkshire to see Mrs. Unwin once more: deplorably indeed was she changed since their last visit to Weston: they came to share for a little while "the tender and even filial attention"

which Cowper had never ceased to pay her; and Mr. Johnson says, "It could not but be a gratifying spectacle for them to see how assiduously he watched over her, even in his darkest seasons of depression." Mr. Powley read a chapter in the Bible to her every morning before she rose: after his departure, Mr. Johnson continued this custom, and as Cowper always visited Mrs. Unwin's chamber the moment he had finished his breakfast, he tried the effect of reading it at that time. "It was a pleasing discovery," he says, "to find that, immersed as his unhappy kinsman was in the depths of despondence, all the billows of which had gone over his soul, he could yet listen with composure to the voice of inspiration, of which he had been conceived to be unwilling to hear even the name." Encouraged by this experiment, Mr. Johnson "ventured, in the course of a few days, to let the members of his family meet for prayers in the room where Cowper was, instead of assembling in another apartment, as they had hitherto done, under the influence, as it proved, of a misconception with regard to his ability to attend the service. On the first occurrence of this new arrangement, of which no intimation had been previously given him, he was preparing to leave the room, but was prevailed on, by a word of soothing and whispered entreaty, to resume his seat."¹⁴

Some change for the better had taken place in his bodily health; from which Hayley, who looked upon the tidings which he received at this time from Norfolk as "good in a very delightful degree,"¹⁵ augured a speedy restoration, "not only of the tranquillity, but even of the splendor of his mind. God grant," said he, "that he may soon smile upon us all, like the sun new risen! But I have a strong persuasion on that subject, and feel convinced myself, (I know not how,) that the good old lady's flight to heaven will prove the precursor of his perfect mental recovery." Those hopes were greatly raised soon afterwards, when, by a fortunate incident, he was led to employ himself once more.

Gilbert Wakefield's edition of Pope's *Homer* had been

¹⁴ Sketch, lxvi. lxvii.

¹⁵ To Mr. Johnson, May 6, 1796.

recently published. Mr. Johnson observed, in Cowper's hearing, that in some places the two translations were compared in it, and he laid the eleven volumes in a large unfrequented room, in which Cowper used to take a few melancholy turns by himself every morning, in his way back from Mrs. Unwin's apartment to the parlor. The next day it was found that he had looked for these, and had made some corrections in his own version in consequence. This reviving interest in what so long had been his favorite occupation was dexterously encouraged by his kinsman, till he saw him sedulously engaged in revising the whole work. Cowper set about this with such spirits, that he said he had never known till then how Homer ought to be translated ; — a speech which might have been thought to imply more failure of judgment than return of sanity. It was, however, reported to Hayley with delight, and heard by him with exultation ; and he was pressed to visit his poor friend now, when his presence seemed likely to accelerate the happy change which had begun. But Hayley had other engagements at this time, which he would have postponed if he had apprehended that it might never afterwards be in his power to undertake the journey with any reasonable expectations of being joyfully received.

Eagerly as Cowper had resumed his employment, their removal to the coast in the ensuing month unsettled him ; he discontinued it immediately, and derived no benefit from sea air and exercise, so that they left Mundsley with darker prospects than when they went there. And now they took up their abode at East Dereham, a town nearly in the centre of Norfolk, and containing at that time about two thousand five hundred inhabitants.

In the seventh century, Withburga, daughter of the East Anglian king Anna, (who was famous for the number of his canonized children,) removed from Holkham to an oratory which she had built for herself and her maidens at this place, then only a village, and called Derrega. Here she gave herself entirely to contemplation, living what her biographers call an angelical life. Now it happened, says the legend, that she and her innocent family of virgins, her attendants, being solicitous to feed their minds with spiritual

delicacies, fell into want of necessary sustenance ; whereupon the holy virgin, careful of her companions, addressed her prayers to her heavenly Master, whose care extends even to the fowls of the air, and besought him to provide for his handmaids who attended only on his service. Forthwith she fell into a slumber, and in her dream the Queen of Virgins appeared to her, " adorned with inexpressible majesty and beauty," and, telling her to take no thought for the morrow, bade her send two of her maidens every morning to the bridge, where two milch deer should meet them, and supply nourishment sufficient for that small family. This continued a long time, till a man of principal authority in the village, deriding the miracle, and instigated by the Devil, took bow and arrows and killed both the deer. " But he that despised miracles was presently smitten with the jaundice, consumed away, and miserably died." It is not to be supposed that Withburga, a king's daughter, and a future saint, would be left destitute with her maidens. The estate belonged to her father : she laid the foundation there of a large church and nunnery, which she did not live to finish ; and dying in the year 743, she was buried in the churchyard. Fifty-five years afterwards it was thought becoming that her remains should be translated into the church of her own foundation ; and it then appeared that the Lord had been pleased " not only to beatify her spirit with immortality, but her chaste body likewise with incorruption ; and not her body only, but her vestments also, were found as fresh as if she had been laid that day in the tomb. Moreover, there issued from the grave a copious spring of most pure water, which had virtue to confer health on many persons afflicted with divers diseases. " It is to this day," says Alban Butler, " called Saint Withburg's well ; was formerly very famous, and is paved, covered, and enclosed : a stream from it forms another small well without, in the churchyard."

Here St. Withburga was venerated with especial honors for several generations, till King Edgar annexed Dereham to Ely Monastery, and gave, moreover, to that favored establishment, the chief treasure of Dereham, to wit, the body of the saint. The people of the place resisted, and the

monks of Ely would not have got possession of their treasure, if they had not stolen it by night; and when they embarked it on the Mere, which it was necessary to cross when Ely was an island, they were in such haste to escape from the close pursuit of the Dereham men, that they must have been lost, if a pillar of fire had not miraculously guided them in safety to the shore. So the still uncorrupted body was deposited at Ely, beside that of her more celebrated sister, St. Etheldreda, otherwise St. Audrey; and its subsequent adventures belong to the history of that cathedral.

Dereham Church is a handsome structure, of great antiquity, in the collegiate form, with a tower in the centre. That tower being pronounced in Henry the Seventh's reign not sufficiently strong to bear the bells, a belfry, called the new clocker, was erected about twenty yards from the chancel, on the south side of the churchyard. Bonner, of abominable memory, was once rector of this church. It is remarkable for many remains of antiquity; and, unless we should in some stage of national insanity imitate the French in their foolery, and translate authors from their graves, as saints were formerly translated, it will be visited hereafter by travellers for Cowper's sake.

It was towards the end of October that Mr. Johnson brought his helpless charge from the sea-coast to his own house at Dereham, and there, on the 17th of December, Mrs. Unwin expired, without the slightest struggle or appearance of pain. Cowper, though he had never hitherto appeared to notice it, was aware that her dissolution was expected; and when the servant opened his window on the morning of the day of her death, he said to her, "Sally, is there life above stairs?" He went to her bedside that morning as usual; and when he returned to the room below, Mr. Johnson, at his desire, immediately began to read to him, which his kinsman, though he had not been desired, would have done, because it was generally found to compose him. The book was Miss Burney's *Camilla*. He had read but a few pages before he was beckoned out of the room to be informed that all was over; and when he returned, Cowper did not question him why he had been called out. From this circumstance, and from his counte-

nance, with every turn of which (in his own words) he had been long familiar, he apprehended that Cowper was perhaps in as fit a state to be informed of the event as he ever could be : sitting down therefore to the book, and turning over the leaves to resume his reading, he told him that his poor old friend had breathed her last. He heard this, "though not entirely without emotion, yet with no more than was compatible," says Mr. Johnson, "with his being read to by his kinsman, who had soon the satisfaction of seeing him as composed as before."

This, however, was no sane composure. A few hours after Mrs. Unwin had breathed her last, he said he was sure that she was not actually dead, but would come to life again in the grave, and then undergo the horrors of suffocation on his account, for he was the occasion of all that she or any other creature upon earth ever did or could suffer. He then seemed to wish to see her. Mr. Johnson accompanied him to the room ; at first he fancied that he saw her stir,—but having looked about a moment at her countenance, changed now from what it was when he had seen it in the morning, and settled into the placidity of death,—he flung himself to the other side of the room with a passionate expression of feeling,—the first that he had uttered, or that had been perceived in him since the last return of his malady at Weston. But the effect for the time was what his kinsman had desired. He became wonderfully calm : as soon as they got down stairs, he asked for a glass of wine ; and from that time he never mentioned her name, nor spoke of her again.

It was not known whether her own wish would have been to be buried with her fathers at Ely, or with her husband at Huntingdon. Mr. and Mrs. Powley decided that she should be interred where she had died, and they came from Yorkshire to the funeral. The time appointed was concealed from Cowper, that he might be spared the agitation which it was likely to produce, and the ceremony therefore was performed at night by torch-light.

Hayley was full of hope that a favorable change would be produced in Cowper by Mrs. Unwin's long-desired release. "I have not ceased," said he to Mr. Johnson, "to

pray fervently for his restoration, both in prose and rhyme." His devotional feelings, indeed, frequently clothed themselves in verse; and on this occasion he sent to East Dereham a sonnet, which, he says, darted into his head as he reclined on the pillow.

Eternal Fountain of all mental power!
 In nightly prayer before thy throne I bend;
 Hear thy grieved servant, praying for his friend!
 For him, on whom, in health's propitious hour,
 It seemed, dread Sire, thy gracious joy to shower
 All that to life can worth and lustre lend;
 Feelings all truth, and fancy without end,
 With probity, the soul's sublimest dower.
 Lord of all beings, and by all adored,
 If evil spirits his good angel crossed,
 O dissipate a darkness so deplored!
 Let friendship see him to himself restored,
 To sink no more in frenzy's hideous frost,
 That petrifies the heart, when reason's lost.

The early part of the year was passed by Cowper in the same state of utter dejection; the only relief which he seemed to experience was in listening to works of fiction; these still retained their charm. But when his mind reverted to its own dreams, nothing could be more appalling than the imaginations which possessed him. Lady Hesketh had remarked that his former letters from Dereham, distressing as they were, were written in his usual free and distinct hand; in the only one which he wrote to her this year the character of the writing was changed; it was equally or even more distinct, but much smaller, and every letter appears to have been separately formed. It contained only these few lines,¹⁶ undated and unsigned:—

"To you once more, and too well I know why, I am under cruel necessity of writing. Every line that I have ever sent you, I have believed, under the influence of infinite despair, the last that I should ever send. This I know to be so. Whatever be your condition, either now or hereafter, it is heavenly, compared with mine, even at this moment. It is unnecessary to add that this comes from the most miserable of beings, whom a terrible minute made such."

¹⁶ The post-mark is May 15, 97.

As the spring advanced, he was persuaded to resume his walks. The house at Dereham was not found less suitable for him, because it fronted the market-place, which was also the high road; that circumstance was by no means displeasing to him; and there was a way into the fields without entering the street. Thus also he could get to an open carriage, for an airing before breakfast, which he was enabled to bear for a few weeks, "owing," Mr. Johnson says, "to the good effect of ass's milk upon his bodily health. This," he adds, "was undoubtedly the period of his last deplorable affliction when the person of Cowper made the nearest approaches to the appearance it had exhibited before his illness. His countenance, from having been extremely thin and of a yellowish hue, had recovered much of its former fulness and ruddy complexion. His limbs were also less emaciated, and his posture more erect; but the oppression on his spirits remained the same. Under these circumstances it was thought advisable to omit the visit to Mundesley this year, and take the utmost advantage of the rides about Dereham.

Eartham had become too expensive an abode for Hayley. Upon declining an invitation to visit his unhappy friend in Norfolk, he says to Mr. Johnson, "I have boldly plunged into brick and mortar, and, with the prudence of a poet, began to build, as the first step in a plan of economy. To explain this riddle, I must inform you, that as I find the sea essential to my health, and to that of the dear sculptor, — (his son,) — I am building a little marine hermitage, in our favorite village of Felpham. I mean to reside in it seven or eight months in the year, letting this lovely spot as a summer residence to some friends, in whom I can confide for a proper care of my books and pictures — the only treasures I am anxious about. It has occurred to me, that it might be possible for us to render this place conducive to our dear Cowper's recovery, and to the reestablishment of Lady Hesketh's health, if you all pitched your tents on this salutary and pleasant hill, during the finer parts of the year, retreating to Dereham in the winter. Meditate on this friendly hint, my dear Johnny, which I have also suggested to Lady Hesketh. We may all think of it at our

leisure, as my new building will not be habitable till next summer ; but it is pleasant to form even distant projects on the basis of benevolence and friendship."

In the adjustment of such a plan, he should exult, he said, rather to sacrifice than promote his own pecuniary interest. But upon proposing it to Lady Hesketh, he found that she thought Clifton suited her better than any other place would do ; "and I imagine," he says, "from the expressions of her letter, that she does not intend to reassume any share in the domestic superintendence of our beloved Cowper, till his mind is perfectly reestablished." Indeed, she was herself an invalid ; her health had not recovered, and probably never fully recovered the effects of continued anxiety during her last residence at Weston. Moreover, if it had been advisable to remove Cowper any where, Weston undoubtedly would have been his own choice, and therefore the place of all others to be preferred.

A whimsical notion now darted (like the sonnet) into Hayley's head ; but if he was shot on his pillow, it must have been at a very early hour,¹⁷ for off he set to Chichester, to communicate it to his friend Guy, a medical practitioner in that city, and he arrived there before Guy was up. "He had recently received," he says,¹⁸ "from Cowper a few of the most gloomy and pathetic lines that ever flowed from the pen of depression ;" and Guy gave him great pleasure by saying he thought his idea might produce a striking effect on the mind of their dejected friend.

The result of this "idea" Hayley has thus related in his *Life of Cowper* : —

"A depression of spirits, which suspended the studies of a writer so eminently endeared to the public, was considered by men of piety and learning as a national misfortune ; and several individuals of this description, though personally unknown to Cowper, wrote to him, in the benevolent

¹⁷ Hayley was a very early riser ; and one of his "incoherent transactions" is said to have been a custom which he had, when he had any guests in the house, of going into their rooms as soon as he had risen, and throwing their windows open.

¹⁸ To his son, June 22, 1797.

hope that expressions of friendly praise, from persons who could be influenced only by the most laudable motives in bestowing it, might reanimate the dejected spirit of a poet not sufficiently conscious of the public service that his writings had rendered to his country, and of that universal esteem which they had so deservedly secured to their author.

"I cannot think myself authorized to mention the names of all who did honor to Cowper and to themselves on this occasion; but I trust the Bishop of Landaff will forgive me if my sentiments of personal regard towards him induce me to take an affectionate liberty with his name, and to gratify myself by recording, in these pages, a very pleasing example of his liberal attention to the interests of humanity.

"He endeavored evangelically to cheer and invigorate the mind of Cowper; but the depression of that mind was the effect of bodily disorder so obstinate, that it received not the slightest relief from what, in a season of corporeal health, would have afforded the most animated gratification to this interesting invalid.

"The pressure of his malady had now made him utterly deaf to the most honorable praise."

In this account Hayley has taken no merit to himself for the curious plan which he had brought to bear. His part in it is explained by the two following letters from Lord Thurlow to Lord Kenyon; they are characteristic of their writer, and of that kindness¹⁹ which his rough exterior concealed from those only who did not know him well.

MY DEAR LORD,

Dulwich, Nov. 22, 1797.

I have been pressed by one mad poet to ask of you for another, a favor which savors of the malady of both. I have waited for an opportunity of doing it verbally; but this gout at this time of the year makes it uncertain when I can see you.

Cowper's distemper persuades him that he is unmeritable

¹⁹ The late Lord Kenyon preserved them for that reason; and to the present lord, the readers, as well as the author of this biography, are obliged for a communication which so curiously fills up the omission in Hayley's half-told tale.

and unacceptable to God. This persuasion, *Hayley* thinks, might be refuted by the testimony of pious men to the service which his works have done to religion and morals. He has therefore set on foot a canvass, by the favor of Mr. George Rose, to obtain the *testimonia insignium virorum* to these services ; by which means he very reasonably hopes to obtain the signatures of the King, the Bishops, the Judges, and other great and religious men who may happen to be found within the same vortex ; but he doubts whether one of the chiefs is exactly within the range of that impulse, and, knowing your goodness to me, he has urged me to prefer his request. In charity to him, I have consented ; and if you think it an act of real charity to the other, I know you will do it.

Cowper's worth and talents I was formerly well acquainted with. The latter are still better known to the world by his writings ; which are certainly filled with animated and impressive pictures of religion and virtue, and deserve every testimonial of his having done them essential service. *Laudari a laudatis viris* must give him pleasure, if his disease will admit of it ; and if the effect of it in removing the malady may be doubted, the experiment seems harmless, at least, and charitable. Yours, &c.

T.

It seems that Lord Kenyon thought Thurlow would best know how his old friend should be addressed upon so extraordinary an occasion ; and accordingly the good-natured Ex-Chancellor drew up for the Lord Chief Justice a form of these testimonials which were to accredit a man to himself.

MY DEAR LORD,

If I find myself at a loss to write about nothing, *you*, whose mind is much more seriously employed, are scarcely better off. It occurs to me, that the young and active imaginations of Lloyd or George would outstrip us both ; but to give an outline of the sort of letter which I suppose to be required, I have sketched the following : —

SIR,

If I must confess that this step is unusual, I must lament that the occasion is no less so. When inferior talents are so often misused to excite light and petulant thoughts upon subjects the most sacred, superior talents employed to excite a due reverence for them naturally engage the gratitude of those who partake of the same zeal. Your animated and impressive expressions of piety have fairly earned the applause of the good, by serving effectually the cause of religion. If it be thought too presuming in a creature to claim merit with his Creator, the humblest mind may hope that his dutiful endeavors will be accepted there. The tribute of my attestation, though not flattering to the *poet*, may yet gratify the *Christian*, by the assurance that he has been successful in the service of our God. This is my motive ; which probably will reconcile, to a mind so candid as yours, the occasion I have taken to avow the esteem with which

I have the honor to be, sir,

Your respectful friend,

And most obedient servant,

KENYON.

The object of the letter proposed, as I collect from Hayley, is to persuade him that he is not rejected. The blunt assurance of this from a stranger, *apropos* to nothing, must revolt him, if he is not too far gone to be moved by any thing ; but insinuated, upon an occasion smoothed over for the purpose, it may perhaps be swallowed. Some care, at the same time, is due to the appearance which such a letter may have ; for though I hope his friends are too discreet to let it be seen by others, yet such an accident is worth looking to.

Yours, &c.

T.

An experiment of Mr. Johnson's was attended with better success. The summer of 1797 had closed, and he dreaded the disuse of bodily exercise during the approaching season, unless Cowper could be induced once more to employ himself. " One morning, therefore, after breakfast, in

the month of September, he placed the commentators on the table, one by one, opening them all, together with the poet's translation at the place where he had left off twelve months before ; but talking with him, as he paced the room, upon a very different subject, namely, the impossibility of the things befalling him which his imagination had represented." This led to such a question as it was wished to call forth, — "And are you sure that I shall be here till the book you are reading is finished?" "Quite sure," replied his kinsman; "and that you will also be here to complete the revisal of your Homer, (pointing to the books,) if you will resume it to-day." As he repeated these words, Mr. Johnson left the room, "rejoicing," he says, "in the well-known token of their having sunk into the poet's mind, namely, his seating himself on the sofa, taking up one of the books, and saying, in a low and plaintive voice, 'I may as well do this, for I can do nothing else.'" ³⁰Fortunate, indeed, was it for him that he had been trained up in that sound learning which had made him from his youth familiar with these incomparable poems. The friends who ministered to him during the last melancholy years of his life, were, as Mrs. Unwin had been at a happier time, thankful to Providence when they saw him engaged upon his translation of them. Mr. Johnson says that it was singularly medicinal to his mind, that more than any thing else it withdrew him from the contemplation of his own frightful delusions, and that it "seemed to extend his breathing, which was at other times short, to a depth of respiration more compatible with ease." From this time the revision was never laid aside.

In the following summer it was thought best to repeat

³⁰ One of his recent biographers says, "We admire the perseverance in a laborious task, the ardent spirit which could now devote its energies to the pursuit of fame, but we regret that life's lingering light — light from Heaven for heavenly purposes — should have been directed to illuminate a profitless and earthly toil, leaving eternal interests unprovided for; like the last rays of the sinking sun resting in barren sweetness upon the cold sterility of the mountain top."

The gentleman who writes thus, with so much effort and so little consideration, has the modesty to pronounce that "the very first line of the Iliad betrays Cowper's superficial acquirements in Greek literature"!!

their visit to the coast, but instead of continuing there for some months, to remain a week at a time, and vary their way of life by returning to Dereham. Before their first migration Cowper wrote to Lady Hesketh : —²¹

June 1, 1798.

Under the necessity of addressing you, as I have done in other days, though these are such as seem to myself absolutely to forbid it, — I say as usual, my dear cousin ; and having said it, am utterly at a loss to proceed. Mr. Johnson says that we are going on Monday to Mundsley, and bids me to tell you so ; but at present he acknowledges himself that it is uncertain whether we go or not, since we cannot know till to-morrow whether there is place for us there, or the lodgings be already full.

Whether the journey be practicable or otherwise, and wherever I am, my distress is infinite ; for I see no possible way of escape, in my circumstances, from miseries such as, I doubt not, will far exceed my most terrible expectations. To wish, therefore, that I had never existed, which has been my only reasonable wish for many years, seems all that remains to one who once dreamed of happiness, but awoke never to dream of it again and who, under the necessity of concluding as he began, subscribes himself your affectionate

WM. COWPER.

Often as he went to the coast during this season, Homer was always his companion now, and contributed, it is said, considerably to that mitigation of his melancholy which was produced by change of scene and diversity of objects. Now, too, instead of novels, he allowed Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works* to be read to him, and the *Pursuits of Literature* ; but when his attention was not thus drawn from himself by

²¹ Mr. Raimondi has favored me with a copy of this letter ; the original is in the possession of a lady at Reading, to whom it was given by Mr. Hill's widow. Lady Hesketh numbered the letters which Cowper wrote to her from Norfolk, as far as ten, out of which number she had parted with two ; one has been thus recovered. I have incorporated them in the *Life*, instead of arranging them among his *Letters*, because they belong peculiarly to his *case*.

impressions from without, he relapsed into the same fixed gloom. The Dowager Lady Spencer came many miles out of her way to call on him. A visit from this lady at Weston, eight years before, had gratified him highly at the time. "I may receive perhaps," he then said,²² "some honors hereafter, should my translation speed according to my wishes and the pains I have taken with it; but shall never receive any that I shall esteem so highly." His *Odyssey* was dedicated to her, and on the morning of this second visit he happened to have begun the revisal of that poem "Such an incident in a happier season," says Hayley, "would have produced a very enlivening effect on his spirits;" but he scarcely spoke to her now.

It seems as if Lady Hesketh had proposed that he should try the effect of a longer journey and a greater change, and visit her at Clifton; for he replies thus to a letter from her at this time:—

DEAR COUSIN,

Mundsley, Oct. 13, 1798.

You describe delightful scenes, but you describe them to one who, if he even saw them, could receive no delight from them,—who has a faint recollection, and so faint as to be like an almost forgotten dream, that once he was susceptible of pleasure from such causes. The country that you have had in prospect has been always famed for its beauties; but the wretch who can derive no gratification from a view of nature, even under the disadvantage of her most ordinary dress, will have no eyes to admire her in any. In one day, in one moment, I should rather have said, she became a *universal blank* to me, and, though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove, as blindness itself. In this country, if there are not mountains, there are hills; if not broad and deep rivers, yet such as are sufficient to embellish a prospect; and an object still more magnificent than any river, the ocean itself, is almost immediately under the window. Why a scenery like this, I had almost said, why is the very scene, which many years since I could not contemplate without rapture, now become, at the best, an insipid wilderness to me? It

²² To Mr. Johnson, Nov. 26, 1790.

neighbors nearly, and as nearly resembles the scenery of Catfield ; but with what different perceptions does it present me ! The reason is obvious. My state of mind is a medium though which the beauties of Paradise itself could not be communicated with any effect but a painful one.

There is a wide interval between us, which it would be far easier for you than for me to pass. Yet I should in vain invite you. We shall meet no more. I know not what Mr. Johnson said of me in the long letter he addressed to you yesterday, but nothing, I am sure, that could make such an event seem probable.

I remain as usual,

dear cousin,

yours,

WM. COWPER.

Toward the close of the year, his old, and kind, and highly esteemed friend, Sir John Throckmorton, who was then on a visit to Lord Petre, rode over to see him. Cowper manifested no pleasure at his sight ; yet he mentioned him to Lady Hesketh in the following letter, as if he had beheld him with more interest than he had expressed : —

DEAR COUSIN,

Dereham, Dec. 8, 1798.

If I gave you your copy of the verses you mention, I do not know how it should be imperfect ; nor, if you made it yourself, how it should be so defective as to require my corrections. If any stanza, ending with the words inserted in your letter to Mr. Johnson, was omitted, it is also omitted in the copy that is here, and it is utterly impossible that I should now replace it, incapable as I am of recollecting a single stanza of the whole. The copy that is in Mr. Johnson's possession he will send to-morrow.

I give all my miserable days to the revisal of Homer, and often many hours of the night to the same hopeless employment ; hopeless on every account ; both because myself am such while engaged in it, and because it is in vain that I bestow any labor at all upon it, on account of the unforeseen impossibility of doing justice to a poet of such great antiquity in a *modern* language, and in a species of

metre far less harmonious than that of the original. That, under such disabling circumstances, and in despair both of myself and of my work, I should yet attend to it, and even feel something like a wish to improve it, would be unintelligible to me, if I did not know that my volitions, and consequently my actions, are under a perpetual irresistible influence. Whatever they were in the earlier part of my life, that such they are now, is, with me, a matter of every day's experience.

This doctrine I once denied, and even now assert the truth of it respecting myself only. There can be no peace where there is no freedom; and he is a wretch indeed who is a necessitarian by experience.

Sir John Throckmorton was here this day se'nnight, much altered since I saw him last, more than I should have thought possible in so short a time, yet not so much but that I should have known him any where. His horse had fallen under him on his way hither, and perhaps he had received more hurt than he acknowledged, which might have some effect in the alteration of his looks that I have mentioned.

It is little worth while to return to the subject of Homer; but I will just add, that I have proceeded in the revisal as far, and somewhat farther than the fifteenth book of the Odyssey.

I remain, dear cousin,

yours as usual,

WM. COWPER.

Mr. Johnson desires me to tell you, that this being Sunday, he has no time to finish his letter to-day, but will send it by the post of to-morrow

Thus the year 1798 closed. On the eighth of the following March he completed the revisal of his Homer, began a preface to the new edition the next morning, and on the day after concluded it. He was then without employment; and when Mr. Johnson, on the day following, laid the commencement of his intended poem on the Four Ages before him, he corrected a few lines, and added two or three more. The will was not wanting; but he felt too surely that the time for such an undertaking had gone

by, and he declined to proceed with it, saying, "it was too great a work for him to attempt in his present situation." Not that he failed in resolution, for no man ever struggled more perseveringly against the pressure of mental disease, nor perhaps, considering the peculiar character of that disease, with such admirable judgment; not that his intellectual powers were in the slightest degree impaired; but he was now an old man; and nature was preparing to deliver him from the body of that death, in which his gentle spirit had so long and so severely suffered.

That evening at supper, other projects of easier accomplishment were suggested to him. He objected to them all, but at length observed, that he had just thought of six Latin verses, and if he could compose any thing, it must be in pursuing that composition. Accordingly, the next morning, his desk was opened for him, and all things duly arranged; he then committed to paper the commencement of his poem on the Ice Islands; and soon afterwards translated it, at Miss Perowne's request, into English. It was then recollected, that when they were at Dunham Lodge, an account of these islands had been read to him in one of the Norwich papers, though it had not seemed to engage his notice at the time. On the day after this translation was made, he wrote *The Cast-away*, founded upon an incident related in *Anson's Voyages*. It is the last original piece that he composed, and, all circumstances considered, one of the most affecting that ever was composed.

THE CAST-AWAY.

OBSCUREST night involved the sky!
 Th' Atlantic billows roared,
 When such a destined wretch as I,
 Washed headlong from on board,
 Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
 His floating home forever left.

No braver chief could Albion boast,
 Than he, with whom he went,
 Nor ever ship left Albion's coast,
 With warmer wishes sent.
 He loved them both, but both in vain,
 Nor him beheld, nor her again.

Not long beneath the whelming brine,
Expert to swim, he lay ;
Nor soon he felt his strength decline,
Or courage die away ;
But waged with death a lasting strife,
Supported by despair of life.

He shouted : nor his friends had failed
To check the vessel's course ;
But so the furious blast prevailed,
That, pitiless perforce,
They left their outcast mate behind,
And scudded still before the wind.

Some succor yet they could afford ;
And, such as storms allow,
The cask, the coop, the floated cord,
Delayed not to bestow ;
But he (they knew) nor ship nor shore,
Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

Nor, cruel as it seemed, could he
Their haste himself condemn,
Aware that flight, in such a sea,
Alone could rescue them ;
Yet bitter felt it still to die
Deserted, and his friends so nigh.

He long survives, who lives an hour
In ocean, self-upheld :
And so long he, with unspent power,
His destiny repelled ;
And ever, as the minutes flew,
Entreated help, or cried, " Adieu ! "

At length, his transient respite past,
His comrades, who before
Had heard his voice in every blast,
Could catch the sound no more.
For then, by toil subdued, he drank
The stifling wave, and then he sank.

No poet wept him : but the page
Of narrative sincere,
That tells his name, his worth, his age,
Is wet with Anson's tear.
And tears, by bards or heroes shed,
Alike immortalize the dead.

I therefore purpose not, or dream,
Descanting on his fate,
To give the melancholy theme
A more enduring date:
But misery still delights to trace
Its semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone;
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.

Hayley has remarked how providentially friend after friend was raised up for Cowper as he needed them, and that in his darkest seasons of calamity he was never without some affectionate attendant. He speaks of Miss Perowne, and Mr. Johnson vouches for the truth of the description, as "one of those excellent beings whom nature seems to have formed expressly for the purpose of alleviating the sufferings of the afflicted, tenderly vigilant in providing for the wants of sickness, and resolutely firm in administering such relief as the most intelligent compassion can supply." Notwithstanding the great aversion which he had latterly had to medicine, Cowper would take it from her hands, and he preferred her assistance to that of any other person. He was not less fortunate in his kinsman. "I never saw," says Hayley, "the human being that would, I think, have sustained the delicate and arduous office in which Mr. Johnson persevered to the last, through a period so long, with an equal portion of unvaried tenderness and unshaken fidelity. A man who wanted sensibility would have renounced the duty; and a man endowed with a particle too much must have felt his own health utterly undermined by an excess of sympathy with the sufferings perpetually in his sight."

The last reading to which Cowper listened appears to have been that of his own works. Beginning with the first volume, Mr. Johnson went through them, and he listened to them in silence till they came to John Gilpin, which he begged not to hear. It reminded him of cheerful

days, and of those of whom he could not bear to think. His kinsman then proceeded to his unpublished poems ; these he heard willingly, but made no remark on them.

On the same day that he had written the *Cast-away*, Mr. Johnson laid his old favorite Vincent Bourne before him ; and from time to time invited, in like manner, his attention to many Greek and Latin pieces of the minor poets. From employment of this kind he seems never to have shrunk again till utterly incapacitated by bodily weakness. He translated also a few of Gay's Fables into Latin ; among them was the *Hare and many Friends* : " O," said he, " that I could recall the days when I could repeat this fable by heart, — when I used to be called upon to do so for the amusement of company ! " — Better and happier days were now rapidly drawing near.

In December they removed to a much more commodious house in the same town. Hayley was at this time printing his *Essay on Sculpture*, and, in composing a note upon the work of Dædalus, representing the dance of Ariadne, as described in the *Iliad*, he perceived, by a remark of D'Hancarville in his *Antiquités Etrusques, Grecs et Romaines*, that both Pope and Cowper had injured the passage by mistaking the meaning of one word. He wrote therefore to Mr. Johnson, hoping that Cowper would correct this error, because he meant to quote the lines in his book. It was immediately altered ; and the improved lines written by Cowper, " in a firm and delicate hand," (no doubt the same letter-by-letter writing that has before been noticed,) were enclosed to Felpham by Mr. Johnson, " Words are not strong enough," said Hayley,²³ in his reply, " to express my delight in your kind letter, and the friendly Homeric favor from our dear reviving bard. What an enchanting *signum salutis* ! — I write to the dear bard himself, because I think he must be well enough to receive a letter of genuine gratitude with some degree of pleasure. But I enclose my letter to you, that you may deliver it at the most favorable moment of the day."

²³ Feb. 1, 1800.

The letter, if it were delivered to Cowper, was not likely to raise his spirits, for it spoke of the long and severe sufferings, and all but utterly hopeless condition of Thomas Hayley, to whom he had been so much attached, — and who, in fact, died only a week after him. But it enclosed a sonnet, inscribed

“TO OUR MOST KIND AND MOST DEAR COWPER.

“BLESSED be the characters, so kindly traced
In that dear hand, which I have longed to view !
Pledge of affection old, and kindness new
From the reviving bard, supremely graced
With all the gifts of fancy, and of taste,
That can endear the mind ; and, given to few,
The rarer, richer gift, a heart as true
As e'er the arms of amity embraced.
Ecstatic tears I on the paper shed,
That speaks, my Cowper, of thy mental health,
And of thy friendship, soothing as the dove.
So weeps the nymph, who, when long storms are fled,
Welcomes from sea, her bosom's rescued wealth
To life, to joy, to glory, and to love.”

It was happy for Hayley that he could always cheer himself with hope, even in the most hopeless circumstances. The lines which Cowper sent him, in that firm but altered hand, were the last he ever wrote. On the day that they were received at Felpham, decided appearances of dropsy were observed in his ankles and feet. A physician was called in ; it was with difficulty that he could be induced to follow his prescriptions, and by the last week in February his weakness was such that he could no longer bear the motion of a carriage. He now ceased to come down stairs ; but was still able, after breakfasting in bed, to remove into another room, and remain there till evening. Before the end of March he was confined altogether to his chamber ; but, except at breakfast, he sate up to his meals. Nothing could be gloomier than his state of mind. Dr. Lubbock, of Norwich, happening to visit a patient in an adjoining village, was requested to see him ; and upon asking him

how he felt, — “Feel!” said Cowper, “I feel unutterable despair!”

But his deliverance was not long delayed. Knowing that it was near, Lady Hesketh would have come to see him once more in this world, if her own infirm health would have permitted it; and Hayley was, in every sense of the word, piously attending upon his dying son. Mr. Rose came to perform this last and painful office of true friendship. Cowper, who used always to welcome him with delight at Weston, manifested no satisfaction at seeing him now; but he showed evident signs of regret at his departure.

On the 19th of April it was apprehended that his death was near. “Adverting,” Mr. Johnson says, “therefore to the affliction, as well of body as of mind, which his beloved inmate was then enduring, his kinsman ventured to speak of his approaching dissolution as the signal of his deliverance from both these miseries. After a pause of a few moments, which was less interrupted by the objections of his desponding relation than he had dared to hope, he proceeded to an observation more consolatory still; namely, that in the world to which he was hastening, a merciful Redeemer had prepared unspeakable happiness for all his children, — and therefore for him. To the first part of this sentence he had listened with composure; but the concluding words were no sooner uttered, than his passionately expressed entreaties that his companion would desist from any further observations of a similar kind, clearly proved that, though it was on the eve of being invested with angelic light, the darkness of delusion still veiled his spirit.”

He lingered five days longer. In the course of Thursday night, when he was exceedingly exhausted, Miss Perowne offered him some cordial; he rejected it, saying, “What can it signify!” and these were the last words he was heard to utter. At five in the ensuing morning, April 25, 1800, that change in the features which betokens approaching death was observed; he became insensible, and remained so till the same hour in the afternoon, when he expired so peacefully that, of the five persons who were

standing at the foot and side of the bed, no one perceived the moment of his departure. "From that moment till the coffin was closed," Mr. Johnson says, "the expression with which his countenance had settled, was that of calmness and composure, mingled, as it were, with holy surprise."

In sure and certain hope indeed for the deceased, might the remains of Cowper be committed to the ground. And never was there a burial at which the mourners might, with more sincerity of feeling, give their hearty thanks to Almighty God, that it had pleased Him to deliver the departed out of the miseries of this sinful world.

He was buried in that part of Dereham Church called St. Edmund's Chapel. Lady Hesketh, who administered to his effects, caused a monument to be erected there; for which Hayley supplied this inscription:—

IN MEMORY OF

WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

BORN IN HERTFORDSHIRE, 1731.

BURIED IN THIS CHURCH, 1800.

YE, who with warmth the public triumph feel
Of talents dignified by sacred zeal,
Here, to devotion's bard devoutly just,
Pay your fond tribute due to Cowper's dust!
England, exulting in his spotless fame,
Ranks with her dearest sons his favorite name.
Sense, fancy, wit, suffice not all to raise
So clear a title to affection's praise:
His highest honors to the heart belong;
His virtues formed the magic of his song.

There too a tablet, to the memory of Mrs. Unwin, "was raised by two other friends, (it is not said who,) impressed with a just and deep sense of her extraordinary merit." For this also the inscription was composed by Hayley:—

IN MEMORY OF

M A R Y,

WIDOW OF THE REV. MORLEY UNWIN,

AND

MOTHER OF THE REV. WILLIAM CAWTHORNE UNWIN.

BORN AT ELY, 1724.

BURIED IN THIS CHURCH, 1796.

TRUSTING in God, with all her heart and mind,
This woman proved magnanimously kind;
Endured affliction's desolating hail,
And watched a Poet through misfortune's vale.
Her spotless dust, angelic guards, defend!
It is the dust of Unwin, Cowper's friend.
That single title in itself is fame;
For all, who read his verse, revere her name.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

AND

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Rhymed tragedies, p. 3. — Johnson says, "The practice of making tragedies in rhyme was introduced, as it seems, by the Earl of Orrery, in compliance with the opinion of Charles II., who had formed his taste by the French theatre; and Dryden, who wrote, and made no difficulty of declaring that he wrote only to please, and who perhaps knew that by his dexterity of versification he was more likely to excel others in rhyme than without it, very readily adopted his master's preference."

It was not necessary for Johnson to mention that our earliest plays, both tragedy and comedy, were in rhyme; this he may have supposed his readers to have known, after the publication of Dodsley's selection of Old Plays. But if he had remembered the tragedies of Daniel, Lord Brook, and Lord Sterline, he would have noticed them. Those of the two latter, however, were not designed for representation, and were composed, with more or less resemblance, upon the ancient model. The rhymes, too, were not in couplets, and the pieces were rather dramatic poems than plays.

Riding rhyme, p. 6. — If Dr. Warton had remembered the opinion expressed in this appellation, he would not have censured Pope for modernizing Chaucer's story of January and May in the same measure as the original. "Pope," he says, "has endeavored suitably to familiarize the stateliness of our heroic measure in this ludicrous narrative; but after all his pains, this measure is not adapted to such subjects so well as the lines of four feet, or the French numbers of Fontaine." — *Essay on Pope*, vol. ii. p. 5.

Dryden's conversion to the Church of Rome, p. 17.

My thoughtless youth was winged with vain desires :
My manhood, long misled by wandering fires,
Followed false lights, and when their glimpse was gone,
My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.
Such was I, such by nature still I am ;
Be thine the glory, and be mine the shame.
Good life be now my task : my doubts are done :
What more could fright my faith, than three in one ?
Can I believe eternal God could be
Disguised in mortal mould and infancy ?
That the great Maker of the world could die ?
And after that, trust my imperfect sense,
Which calls in question his omnipotence ?

Can I my reason to my faith compel?
 And shall my sight, and touch, and taste rebel?
 Superior faculties are set aside;
 Shall their subservient organs be my guide?
 Then let the moon usurp the rule of day,
 And winking tapers show the sun his way!

Hind and Panther.

Any one who understood the grounds of the Protestant faith might have quoted to Dryden, upon this notable passage, his own words —

— Winnow well this thought, and you shall find
 'Tis light as chaff that flies before the wind!

The mysteries of the Trinity, of the Divinity of our Savior, and of the real presence, are believed by the Church of England, because the belief of that church is founded upon the scriptures, and the scriptures only. Dryden's error upon the latter point lay in confounding the mystery of the real presence with the figment of transubstantiation.

But when Dryden wrote the *Religio Laici*, a strong sense of the mischiefs produced by sectarianism had prepared him for his subsequent change. In the preface to that poem, after showing what were the real dangers from Popery, he speaks of that other extreme of our religion, the fanatics, or schismatics of the English Church. "Since the Bible," says he, "has been translated into our tongue, they have used it so as if their business was not to be saved, but to be damned by its contents. If we consider only them, better had it been for the English nation that it had still remained in the original Greek and Hebrew, or at least in the honest Latin of St. Jerome, than that several texts in it should have been prevaricated to the destruction of that government which put it into so ungrateful hands. — Many of them who had been in France and Geneva brought back the rigid opinions and imperious discipline of Calvin to graft upon our reformation, which though they cunningly concealed at first, as well knowing how nauseously that drug would go down in a lawful monarchy which was prescribed for a rebellious commonwealth, yet they always kept it in reserve; and were never wanting to themselves either in court or parliament when they had any prospect of a numerous party of fanatic members of the one, or the encouragement of any favorite in the other, whose covetousness was gaping at the patrimony of the church. — To their ignorance all things are wit which are abusive; but if church and state were made the theme, then the doctoral degree of wit was to be taken at Billingsgate: even the most saintlike of the party, though they durst not excuse their contempt and vilifying of the government, yet were pleased, and grinned at it with a pious smile, and called it a judgment of God against the hierarchy. Thus sectaries, we may see, were born with teeth, foul-mouthed and scurrilous from their infancy; and if spiritual pride, venom, violence, contempt of superiors, and slander, had been the marks of orthodox belief, the presbytery, and the rest of our schismatics, which are their spawn, were always the most visible church in the Christian world.

"While we were papists, our holy father led us by pretending authority out of the scriptures to depose princes. When we shook off his authority, the sectaries furnished themselves with the same weapons, and out of the same magazine — the Bible; so that the scriptures, which are in themselves the greatest security of governors, as com-

manding express obedience to them, are now turned to their destruction; and never since the reformation has there wanted a text of their interpreting to authorize a rebel. And it is to be noted by the way, that the doctrines of king-killing and deposing, which have been taken up only by the worst party of the papistry, the most frontless flatterers of the pope's authority, have been espoused, defended, and are still maintained by the whole body of nonconformists and republicans. It is but dubbing themselves the people of God, which it is the interest of their preachers to tell them they are, and their own interest to believe; and after that they cannot dip into the Bible, but one text or another will turn up for their purpose; if they are under persecution, as they call it, then that is a mark of their election; if they flourish then God works miracles for their deliverance, and the saints are to possess the earth." — *Preface to Religio Laici*.

The pinchbeck age of poetry, p. 24. — "Indeed it is not without reason that poetry is now generally held in little esteem; in general modern poetry deserves but little. Since the happy invention of printing, this species of literature has gradually sunk into disregard; and the reason is obvious. Every dull pretender to the Muse finds means to get his compositions, be they ever so bad, into print, and then the public is pestered with them, according to the various circumstances and degrees of the author's necessities or vanity. It was otherwise among the ancients, who saw every thing in manuscript. Nobody would take the trouble of transcribing bad things, except their authors; and even they were under the less temptation of being either at the pains of copying their works themselves, or the expense of paying others to do it for them, as doubtless they always found it difficult enough to get them off at such a price as would be deemed equivalent to the trouble or charge. Hence it is that we have so few bad books from the ancients, and hence it was that poetry acquired more universal esteem and honor with them than it does with us. They seldom met with any but the works of such excellent geniuses as to this day are greatly valued and admired. But in our later times, so large has been the inundation of rhyming trumpery from the press, that even the name of a poet and of poetry are become so cheap, so contemptible, and in some instances so abominable, that a real genius is often ashamed to be ranked among the sons of the Muses, though in company even with Homer, Horace, and Milton." — *Monthly Review*, vol. iv. Nov. 1750, pp. 28, 29.

Fifteen years later (1765) the same journal speaks of "the herd of poetasters with which the pamphlet-shops, the Magazines, the Chronicles, the Evening Posts, the Advertisers, the Gazetteers, the Weekly Journals, and even the very Almanacs are pestered. It is said a remedy has been found for the epidemical distemper among the cattle; we are sorry that no one in this nostrum-inventing age has yet discovered a cure for the poetical murrain by which so many of his majesty's subjects are totally lost — to society." — Vol. xxxii. p. 75.

The art of poetry was made easy to the meanest capacity, p. 25. — "There is a great deal of cant in the style of poetry, especially of modern poetry. A set of epithets, and figures, and phrases, which a certain set of versifiers bring in upon all occasions, in order to make out their verses and prepare their rhymes, — if a poet has got a good stock

of these, and a knack of applying them, and is not very solicitous about energy, consistency, or truth of sentiment, he may write verses with great ease and rapidity; but such verses are not read above once or twice, and are seldom or never remembered." — *Beattie. Forbes's Life*, vol. ii. p. 13.

"There are authors without one original power of the mind, who can pour out mechanical verses with an inexhaustible vein. Let an acute critic examine these verses, and he will trace with the most unqualified certainty the echo of mere *words* impressed by the author's study of original writers; to which words, from the use made of them, from the jumbled combination, and the utter want of any intelligible train of ideas, it will be demonstrable that no distinct images or thoughts are affixed. It is possible that they may excite some confused activity in the writer's brains; but the words are only suggested, and follow one another by some *mechanical link*. Or, if we admit that they convey to the author's mind the ideas which they properly represent, still in such authors the words lead the thoughts, and not the thoughts the words.

"There is scarce any class of writers more contemptible than these. All false pretence is always disgusting in itself; and doubly so, because it has a tendency to degrade what is true, by exposing it to be confounded with the false by the ignorant multitude." — *Sir Egerton Brydges's Recollections of Foreign Travels*, vol. i. p. 240.

His taste had been influenced by the set with which he associated in early life, p. 27. — Lloyd was manly enough to write and insert in his Magazine, in the form of an epistle to himself, a remonstrance upon this subject.

I hate the style that still defends
Yourself, or praises all your friends,
As if the club of wits was met
To make eulogiums on the set.
Say, must the town forever hear,
And no reviewer dare to sneer,
Of Thornton's humor, Garrick's nature,
And Colman's wit, and Churchill's satire?
Churchill, who — let it not offend
If I make free, though he's your friend;
And sure we cannot want excuse,
When Churchill's named for smart abuse; —
Churchill, who ever loves to raise
On Slander's dung his mushroom bays.
The priest, I grant, has something clever,
A something that will last forever.
Let him in part be made your pattern,
Whose Muse, now queen, and now a slattern,
Tricked out in Rosciad, rules the roast,
Turns trapes and trollop in the Ghost,
By turns both tickles us and warms,
And drunk, or sober, has her charms.

* * *
And Colman, too, that little sinner,
That easy-weaver, drama-spinner,
Too much the comic *sock* will use,
For 'tis the law must find him *shoes*;
And though he thinks on fame's wide ocean
He swims, and has a pretty motion,
Inform him, Lloyd, for all his grin,
That Harry Fielding holds his chin.

Now higher soar, my Muse, and higher,
To Bonnell Thornton, hight Esquire;

The only man to make us laugh,
 A very Peter Paragraph ;
 The grand conductor and adviser
 In Chronicle and Advertiser,
 Who still delights to run his rig
 On citizen and periwig.
 Good sense, I know, though dashed with oddity,
 In Thornton is no scarce commodity ;
 Much learning, too, I can decry,
 Beneath his periwig doth lie. —
 I beg his pardon ; I declare
 His grizzle's gone for greasy hair,
 Which now the wag with ease can screw
 With dirty riband in a queue.
 But why neglect (his trade forsaking)
 For scribbling, and for merry-making)
 With tye to overshadow that brain
 Which might have shone in Warwick Lane ?
 Why not, with spectacle on nose,
 In chariot lazily repose,
 A formal, pompous, deep physician,
 Himself a sign-post exhibition ?
St. James's Mag. April, 1763, pp. 114, 115, 116.

Churchill, p. 38. — Heartily as Churchill hated the Scotch, he was himself of the half-blood. This appears from a passage in the Prophecy of Famine, remarkable also for containing an unequivocal intimation that he had renounced not only his orders, but his belief.

Once, be the hour accursed, accursed the place !
 I ventured to blaspheme the chosen race.
 Into those traps, which men, called Patriots, laid,
 By specious arts unwarily betrayed,
Madly I leagued against that sacred earth,
Vile parricide ! which gave a parent birth.
 But shall I meanly Error's path pursue,
 When heavenly Truth presents her friendly clew
 Once plunged in ill, shall I go farther in ?
 To make the oath, was rash ; to keep it, sin.
 Backward I tread the paths I trod before,
 And calm reflection hates what passion swore.
 Converted, (blessed are the souls which know
 Those pleasures which from true conversion flow,
Whether to reason, who now rules my breast,
Or to pure faith, like Littelton and West,)
 Past crimes to expiate, be my present aim
 To raise new trophies to the Scottish name.
 V. 217—234.

Churchill's dislike of Pope, p. 41. — One of the most poetical passages in Gotham would have been disfigured by an expression of this feeling, if he had not wisely struck out a couplet so ill in keeping with all that preceded and followed it.

Farewell, ye Muses ! — though it cuts my heart,
 E'en to the quick, we must forever part.
 When the fresh morn bade lusty Nature wake ;
 When the birds, sweetly twittering through the brake,
 Tune their soft pipes ; when from the neighboring bloom
 Sipping the dew, each zephyr stole perfume ;
 When all things with new vigor were inspired,
 And seemed to say they never could be tired ;
 How often have we strayed, while sportive rhyme
 Deceived the way, and clipped the wings of Time,
 O'er hill, o'er dale, how often laughed to see, —
 Yourselves made visible to none but me, —

The clown, his works suspended, gape and stare,
 And seem to think that I conversed with air.
 When the sun, beating on the parched soil,
 Seemed to proclaim an interval of toil;
 When a faint languor crept through every breast,
 And things most used to labor wished for rest;
 How often underneath a reverend oak,
 Where, safe, and fearless of the impious stroke,
 Some sacred Dryad lived; or in some grove,
 Where, with capricious fingers, Fancy wove
 Her fairy bower, whilst Nature all the while
 Looked on, and viewed her mockeries with a smile,
 Have we held converse sweet! how often laid,
 Fast by the Thames, in Ham's inspiring shade,
 Amongst those poets which make up your train,
 And after death pour forth the sacred strain, —
 Have I, at your command, in verse grown gray,
 But not impaired, heard Dryden tune that lay
 Which might have drawn an angel from his sphere,
 And kept him from his office listening here.

¹ When dreary Night, with Morpheus in her train,
 Led on by Silence to resume her reign,
 With darkness covering, as with a robe,
 The scene of levity, blanked half the globe,
 How oft, enchanted with your heavenly strains,
 Which stole me from myself, — which in soft chains
 Of music bound my soul, — how oft have I,
 Sounds more than human floating through the sky,
 Attentive sat, whilst Night, against her will,
 Transported with the harmony, stood still!
 How oft in raptures, which man scarce could bear,
 Have I, when gone, still thought the Muses there;
 Still heard their music, and as mute as death,
 Sat all attention, drew in every breath,
 Lest, breathing all too rudely, I should wound
 And mar that magic excellence of sound;
 Then, sense returning with return of day,
 Have chid the night, which fled so fast away!
 Such my pursuits, and such my joys of yore,
 Such were my mates, but now my mates no more.
 Placed out of Envy's walk, (for Envy, sure,
 Would never haunt the cottage of the poor,
 Would never stoop to wound my homespun lays,)
 With some few friends, and some small share of praise,
 Beneath oppression, undisturbed by strife,
 In peace I trod the humble vale of life.

Gotham, b. lii. v. 389—448.

Descriptive poetry, p. 49. — One who in Cowper's days had seated himself in the seat of the critic, delivered an unfavorable opinion of descriptive poems. "That poetry," he said, "which is employed in rural description lies under many disadvantages. Though there is a variety, there is, likewise, a uniformity in the works of nature, which renders it difficult to embellish such subjects with images that have not been exhibited by former writers. With regard to the moralizing of rural paintings, it is almost always attended with quaintness and a forced manner; — nor is it difficult to investigate the cause: all moral truths are of an abstracted nature, and when we attempt to illustrate them by objects of the senses, the transition from the natural sim-

¹ Wilkes afterwards printed the two lines which had been properly struck out from this place. They were these: —

Whilst Pope, with envy stung, inflamed with pride,
 Piped to the vacant air on t'other side.

plicity of the latter to the refinement of the former, is incompatible with that ease which we expect to find in poetical descriptions, and interrupts that attention which we are always inclined to afford. The descriptive poet should leave the discovery of the moral to the sagacity of his readers; by which means they will be flattered with the indulgence of their own penetration; and this a skilful writer may always effect, by rendering the moral conclusion obvious, without drawing it himself." — *Monthly Review*, vol. xxxvii. p. 16.

Mason composed his plays upon an artificial model, and in a gorgeous diction, because he thought Shakspeare had precluded all hope of excellence in any other form of drama, p. 50.

How oft I cried, "O come, thou tragic Queen!
 March from thy Greece with firm, majestic tread,
 Such as when Athens saw thee fill her scene,
 When Sophocles thy choral Graces led;
 Saw thy proud pall its purple length devolve;
 Saw thee uplift the glittering dagger high;
 Ponder, with fixed brow, thy deep resolve,
 Prepared to strike, to triumph, and to die.
 Bring then to Britain's plain that choral throng;
 Display thy buskined pomp, thy golden lyre;
 Give her historic forms the soul of song,
 And mingle Attic art with SHAKSPEARE'S fire!"
 "Ah, what, fond boy, dost thou presume to claim?"
 The Muse replied, "Mistaken suppliant, know,
 To light in SHAKSPEARE'S breast the dazzling flame,
 Exhausted all PARNASSUS could bestow.
 True, Art remains; and if, from his bright page,
 Thy mimic power one vivid beam can seize,
 Proceed; and in that best of tasks engage,
 Which tends at once to profit and to please."
 She spake; and Harewood's towers spontaneous rose,
 Soft virgin warblings echoed through the grove;
 And fair ELFRIDA poured forth all her woes,
 The hapless pattern of connubial love.
 More awful scenes old Mona next displayed;
 Her caverns gloomed, her forests waved on high,
 While flamed within their consecrated shade
 The genius stern of British liberty.

Epistle to Hurd.

Mason ingenuously confessed that he was too much elated by popular applause, p. 50.

Too long, alas, my inexperienced youth,
 Misled by flattering Fortune's specious tale,
 Has left the rural reign of peace and truth,
 The huddling brook, cool cave, and whispering vale;
 Won to the world, a candidate for praise,
 Yet, let me boast, by no ignoble art,
 Too oft the public ear has heard my lays;
 Too much its vain applause has touched my heart.

Elegy written in the Garden of a Friend, 1758.

Mason's Elfrida and Caractacus represented with success, p. 50.
 —I saw them both, in my boyhood, at Bath and Bristol, and well remember Mrs. Siddons as Elfrida, before she appeared in London.

"Elfrida," says the *Monthly Review*, (Dec. 1772,) "overcame all our common prejudices against the ancient form of tragedy, especially against the Chorus. Mr. Colman, therefore, deserves praise for introducing on the stage, under his direction, so elegant a performance;

and as a proof of the skill and judgment with which he has endeavored to render it a pleasing exhibition to every class of the spectators, we must add, for the information of our distant readers, that it hath been received with a much warmer, more general, and more lasting approbation, than, perhaps, even the most sanguine admirers of the poem could have expected from a work which the author never intended for theatrical representation."

Spenser depreciated, p. 52.

Ye haunt not that licentious grove
Where Spenser's desperate champions rove;
Your chaste ear loves not to be told
Of blatant Beasts, of dread Despair,
With glaring eyes, with clotted hair,
And brutal chivalries of old.

Thus it is that Michael Wodhull blasphemes Spenser in an Ode to the Dryads; and the Monthly Reviewers (Jan. 1764) were "glad to find that he agreed with them in disapproving the filthy images, and the loathsome, bloody allegories of the Faery Queen!"

In an earlier volume this journal had praised Spenser, but called for a translation into modern English!

In reviewing an anonymous poem on the Seasons, in imitation of Spenser, (1751,) the critic, who says that the author's imagination glows with a warmth superior to that of Spenser, has the following notable remarks:—

"If the exploded words which render the English writers of Queen Elizabeth's days almost unintelligible to the present age, are *justly exploded*, and totally disused in every other branch of literature, why, in the name of common sense, are they every now and then raised from the dead by our poets? Is the modern English, as it appears in the works of an Addison, a Swift, or a Bolingbroke, at all the worse for the want of such words as *eftsoons*, *wend*, *reckless*, *muchel*, *eft*, *erst*, and many thousands still more barbarous, and very justly condemned to those glossaries where they ought to rest in peace? If our author would give us a good translation of Spenser's works into modern English, free from those unintelligible words and phrases, which, to his misfortune, he was obliged to use, we are persuaded that admirable poet would be read by many who cannot endure the unpoetical barabness of his original language. Nor, indeed, is his labored stanza at all agreeable to those who love *ease* in reading; it is mere slavery to many to preserve at once clear ideas of his sense, and of the *mechanism*, order, and jingle of his versification and rhymes."— May, 1751, p. 520.

Pope's epic, p. 63.—"Under the title of Alfred," it is said in the letter, more probably by an error in Cowper's recollection, than a printer's bold alteration of an unknown name to a known one.

Pope wrote an epic poem when very young; it was in rhyme, and was called Alcander. He planned another many years afterwards upon the story of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Brutus; and this he meant to be in blank verse. Cowper's mistake seems to have proceeded from a confused recollection of the name of the first, and the subject of the second; the former began with *Al*; the latter was taken from our early history; and so he hit upon Alfred.

A more ludicrous error of association, occurring in a similar way,

came under my own observation. Among the four-footed acquaintance with whom I used to exchange a greeting when we met, was a terrier, named Esop. A friend who accompanied me often enough in my walks to notice the salutations that passed between us, always called him Jacob; the connecting link in his mind was Esau.

Letter referred to, p. 83.

TO MRS. NEWTON, AT MR. PRINDER'S, NORTHAMPTON.

I HOPE, my dear madam, this will meet you well, and safely returned thus far on your journey. Though it will be a sincere pleasure to me to see you and dear Mr. Newton again, yet I beg you will not put yourselves to the least inconvenience or hurry to reach home, till the most fit and agreeable time. The Lord is very gracious to us; for though the cloud of affliction still hangs heavy on Mr. Cowper, yet he is quite calm and persuadable in every respect. He has been for these few days past more open and communicative than heretofore. It is amazing how subtilly the cruel adversary has worked upon him; and wonderful to see how the Lord has frustrated his wicked machinations; for though he has not seen good to prevent the most violent temptations and distressing delusions, yet he has prevented the mischievous effects the enemy designed by them: a most marvellous story will this dear child of God have to relate, when, by his Almighty power, he is set at liberty. As nothing short of Omnipotence could have supported him through this sharp affliction, so nothing less can set him free from it. I allow that means are, in general, not only lawful, but also expedient; but in the present case, we must, I am convinced, advert to our first sentiment, that this is a peculiar and exempt one, and that the Lord Jehovah will be alone exalted when the day of deliverance comes.

I must beg the favor of you to buy for me two pounds of chocolate, half a pound or ten ounces of white sixpenny worsted, half a dozen lemons, and two sets of knitting-needles, six in a set, one the finest that can be got, of iron and steel, the other a size coarser. Sally nor Judy know of my writing, else I am sure they would desire me to insert their duty. Pray present my affectionate remembrance to Mr. Newton, and my sincere respects to Mr. and Mrs. Prinder, and Miss Smith; and believe me to be, my dearest madam, your truly affectionate and highly-indebted friend,

Oct. 7, 1773.

M. UNWIN.

Mr. Newton saw the unfitness of fiery and sulphureous preaching, p. 106.—"Very alarming books are not the most suitable for ignorant folks, and especially, if, as is generally the case, gross ignorance is found combined with great wickedness. The evil and desert of sin, and its certain and terrible consequences, unless repented of and forsaken, ought doubtless to be insisted on; but it is the grace of the gospel that softens and wins the heart. By nature and practice we are in a state of alienation from God; we form hard thoughts of him, and therefore do not like to think of him at all, because we know not his name,—his true character. The gospel tells us that *God is love*, and gives this astonishing proof, that he gave his own Son to die for his enemies. Many daring sinners need not be told that their state is dangerous; they feel it, and the more the thought is pressed upon

them, the more their enmity against God is increased; they know they can neither resist nor escape; they have nothing to hope, but every thing to fear, and therefore they hate him.

"A friend of mine was desired to visit a woman in prison; he was informed of her evil habits of life, and therefore spoke strongly of the terrors of the Lord, and the curses of the law: she heard him awhile, and then laughed in his face: upon this he changed his note, and spoke of the Savior, and what he had done and suffered for sinners. He had not talked long in this strain before he saw a tear or two in her eyes: at length she interrupted him by saying, 'Why, sir, do you think there can be any hope of mercy for me?' He answered, 'Yes, if you feel your need of it, and are willing to seek it in God's appointed way. I am sure it is as free for you as for myself.' She replied, 'Ah, if I had thought so, I should not have been in this prison. I long since settled it in my mind that I was utterly lost; that I had sinned beyond all possibility of forgiveness; and that made me desperate.' He visited her several times, and when she went away, (for she was transported,) he had good reason to hope that she was truly converted. He gave me this relation more than forty years ago, and it has been, I hope, of some use to me through the course of my ministry. Christ crucified, is the wisdom and power of God." — *Letter from Mr. Newton. Roberts's Life of H. Moore*, vol. iii. p. 7.

In a letter to Mr. Thornton, he says, "To the best of my judgment, I preach a full Savior, and a free gospel. But the Lord's work here is in such a line, that it is usually long before my people can triumph. I know no people, (taken collectively,) more spiritual and humble, who set a higher value upon the means of grace, walk more affectionately towards each other, and towards their minister, or give less cause to the world to speak evil of the way; but it is usually a good while before they obtain a firm assurance, though, I bless God, they do obtain it gradually. Dear Mary Lambert, who, I believe, could sing the song in Isaiah xii. as steadfastly and joyfully as most people upon earth, was fourteen years in much exercise and temptation, before the Lord turned her mourning into joy, though she was an earnest seeker, and an exemplary walker, from her first awakening. Something like this is the experience of most of them. It has been sometimes a trouble to me that they have been so slow to receive comfort; but when I have seen their simplicity, steadfastness, and humility, and that the Lord has, in many instances, made the subsequent building of grace striking and glorious, in proportion to the time he employs in laying the foundation, and giving them a deep sense of what is in their hearts, I have been more reconciled, and willing that He should take his own method, as indeed He will, for He keeps the key of comfort in his own hand. Indeed I can seldom triumph myself; but, blessed be his name, I have peace. I know whom I have believed, and his Spirit bears witness with my conscience that I have no allowed pursuit, but to serve him with my all, to obtain more of his image and more of his presence. The much that I feel within me contrary to his will, though it does not prevent my confidence, makes me walk softly."

Olney, Dec. 15, 1775.

Cowper never lost sight of the original in his corrections, and Pope utterly disregarded it, p. 134. — When I was looking, says Spence, on his foul copy of the Iliad, and observing how very much it was corrected and

Johnson has given many specimens, any one of which might justify the assertion in my text. I insert here, as the most remarkable, the famous simile of the moonlight.

Johnson has given many specimens, any one of which might justify the assertion in my text. I insert here, as the most remarkable, the famous simile of the moonlight.

Cowper must have smiled when he read his Aunt Madan's eulogium on Pope in her Progress of Poetry.

High on the radiant list, see Pope appears,
With all the fire of youth and strength of years !
Where'er supreme he points the nervous line,
Nature and Art in bright conjunction shine.
How just the turns ! how regular the draught !
How smooth the language ! how refined the thought !
Secure beneath the shade of early bays,
He dared the thunder of great Homer's lays ;
A sacred heat informed his heaving breast,
And Homer in his genius stands confessed :
To heights sublime he raised the ponderous lyre,
And our cold Isle grew warm with Grecian fire.

Poetical Calendar, vol. iii. p. 27.

The lines which this lady, before her marriage, wrote on her brother Ashley's Coke upon Littleton are free from the false diction of this panegyric.

O thou who laborest in this rugged mine,
 May'st thou to gold the unpolished ore refine !
 May each dark page unfold its haggard brow !
 Doubt not to reap if thou canst bear to plough !
 To tempt thy care may each revolving night
 Purses and maces swim before thy sight !
 From hence, in times to come, adventurous deed !
 May'st thou essay to look and speak like Mead !
 When the black bag and rose no more shall shade
 With martial air the honors of thy head ;
 When the full wig thy visage shall enclose,
 And only leave to view thy learned nose,
 Safely may'st thou defy beaux, wits, and scoffers,
 While tenants, in fee simple, stuff thy coffers.

Dodsley's Collection, vol. iv. p. 226.

SWEET MEAT HAS SOUR SAUCE ;

OR,

THE SLAVE-TRADER IN THE DUMPS.

Referred to p. 150.

A TRADER I am to the African shore ;
 But since that my trading is like to be o'er,
 I'll sing you a song that you ne'er heard before,
 Which nobody can deny, deny,
 Which nobody can deny.

When I first heard the news, it gave me a shock
 Much like what they call an electrical knock ;
 And now I am going to sell off my stock,
 Which nobody, &c.

'Tis a curious assortment of dainty regales,
 To tickle the Negroes with when the ship sails,
 Fine chains for the neck, and a cat with nine tails,
 Which nobody, &c.

Here's supple-jack plenty, and store of ratan,
 That will wind itself round the sides of a man,
 As close as a hoop round a bucket or can,
 Which nobody, &c.

Here's padlocks and bolts, and screws for the thumbs,
 That squeeze them so lovingly till the blood comes,
 They sweeten the temper like comfits or plums,
 Which nobody, &c.

When a Negro his head from his victuals withdraws,
 And clenches his teeth and thrusts out his paws,
 Here's a notable engine to open his jaws,
 Which nobody, &c.

Thus going to market, we kindly prepare
 A pretty black cargo of African ware,
 For what they must meet with when they get there,
 Which nobody, &c.

'Twould do your heart good to see 'em, below,
 Lie flat on their backs all the way as we go,
 Like sprats on a gridiron, scores in a row,
 Which nobody, &c.

But ah! if in vain I have studied an art
 So gainful to me, all boasting apart,
 I think it will break my compassionate heart,
 Which nobody, &c.

For O! how it enters my soul like an awl!
 This pity, which some people self-pity call,
 Is sure the most heart-piercing pity of all,
 Which nobody, &c.

So this is my song, as I told you before;
 Come, buy off my stock, for I must no more
 Carry Cæsars and Pompeys to Sugar-cane shore,
 Which nobody can deny, deny,
 Which nobody can deny.

Audible illusions, p. 213. — A curious case of this kind may be found in the Life of John Bunyan: such cases indeed abound in lives of that description.

The following passage in Boswell's Life of Johnson, (vol. viii. p. 70, edit. 1835,) bears upon this subject: —

"He mentioned a thing as not unfrequent, of which I had never heard before, — being *called*, — that is, hearing one's name pronounced by the voice of a known person at a great distance, far beyond the possibility of being reached by any sound uttered by human organs. 'An acquaintance, on whose veracity I can depend, told me, that walking home one evening to Kilmarnock, he heard himself *called* from a wood, by the voice of a brother who had gone to America; and the next packet brought account of that brother's death.' Macbean asserted that this inexplicable *calling* was a thing very well known. Dr. Johnson said, that one day at Oxford, as he was turning the key of his chamber, he heard his mother distinctly call, *Sam*. She was then at Lichfield; but nothing ensued. This phenomenon (Boswell adds) is, I think, as wonderful as any other mysterious fact, which many people are very slow to believe, or rather, indeed, reject with an obstinate contempt."

Mrs. Piozzi (Ib. ix. p. 69,) relates the same story, with only a difference of date: "I well remember," says this lady, "that at Brighthelmston once, when he was not present, Mr. Beauclerc asserted that he was afraid of spirits; and I, who was secretly offended at the charge, asked him, the first opportunity I could find, what ground he had ever given to the world for such a report. 'I can,' replied he, 'recollect nothing nearer it than my telling Dr. Lawrence, many years ago, that a long time after my poor mother's death, I heard her voice call, *Sam*!' — 'What answer did the Doctor make to your story, Sir?' said I. 'None in the world,' replied he, and suddenly changed the conversation. Now, as Mr. Johnson had a most unshaken faith, without any mixture of credulity, this story must either have been strictly true, or his persuasion of its truth the effect of disordered spirits. I relate the anecdote precisely as he told it me; but could not prevail upon him to draw out the talk into length for further satisfaction of my curiosity."

A more remarkable example of these organic illusions is within my own knowledge. One who is so deaf that he hears only through a trumpet has at times distinct impressions of hearing a pack of hounds with huntsmen in full cry, — a barrel organ in the street, &c.

The famous story of Mrs. Honeywood, p. 263. — I have given in the text that version which was evidently in Cowper's mind. A different one, less pertinent to his own state, and in itself less probable, is thus

related in the life of Fox, the martyrologist, by his son, who prefaced it by saying, "Many things did Master Fox foretell, by occasion of comforting the afflicted, or terrifying those that were stubborn, to which the event proved after answerable; and perchance in many things he was deceived." — After relating a prediction that the Lady Anne Heneage would recover, when the physician had pronounced her fever deadly, which prediction was verified by the event, — "like to this," he says, "and no less true, was that story of Mrs. Honeywood, an honorable gentlewoman, who had almost twenty years lain sick of a consumption through melancholy; neither did any one seem to have advice or courage sufficient against the force of so mischievous a disease, though she had already consulted with the gravest divines, and the best physicians, and with all who, either in the art of curing or power of persuading, were accounted to excel the rest. At length she sent also for Master Fox. They who went along with him thither, related afterward, that never had they entered into a more heavy or afflicted house. There sate by the sick woman, to attend her, her friends, kinsfolk, children, and servants, some upon seats, and some on the chamber floor, not weeping or sighing, as those commonly do that lament, but having spent all their tears, resolutely silent, neither rising to those that came in, nor answering those that asked any question, as if that also became their mourning. You might have guessed them so many statues of mourners in human likeness. The sick woman lay upon her bed, without any hope of life, together with her frequent sighs faintly breathing forth some few words; the effect whereof was that she desired to end her days. Master Fox, when he had so many patients under his hands at once, not thinking fit, where a grief so violent would make strong resistance, to attempt any thing in vain, lest in not being by reason overcome they might seem to have had reason on their side, left all other means of consolation, and what he thought necessary to cure their afflicted minds, he diligently mingled with his prayers; so that within a few days, they who were thought impossible by man's help to be cured, did now seem of their own accord to begin to recover. At length, having further endeared himself, he then told her that she should not only grow well of that consumption, but also live to an exceeding great age. At which words the sick gentlewoman, a little moved, and earnestly beholding Master Fox, — 'As well might you have said,' quoth she, 'that if I should throw this glass against the wall, I might believe it would not break to pieces!' and holding a glass in her hand, out of which she had newly drank, she threw it forth; neither did the glass, first by chance lighting on a little chest standing by the bed-side, and afterward falling upon the ground, either break or crack in any place about it. And the event fell out accordingly. For the gentlewoman, being then threescore years of age, lived afterward for all example of felicity, seldom seen in the offspring of any family; being able, before the ninetieth year of her age, (for she lived longer,) to reckon three hundred and threescore of her children's children and grandchildren."

"Among which, (says a marginal note,) at this day, to wit, in the year of our Lord 1641, in which this book is set forth, there liveth Mrs. Grace Heneage, the daughter of the said Mrs. Honeywood, a gentlewoman of great worth, and the widow of an honorable gentleman, Master Michael Heneage, who affirmeth that she was present at the same time this was done, being a witness of more integrity, and more sincere than that her testimony should without great wrong be doubted."

East Dereham, p. 322. — "In the centre of the town stands a square column, on the sides of which are marked the distances in measured miles from the principal towns and seats in the county. They are said not to be strictly accurate; but it is a little singular, that the distance marked upon this pillar serves to explain the meaning of the term *leuca*, which has by many been interpreted the French league of three miles. Dereham is sixteen miles from Norwich; and in the Rolls of the King's Bench, it appears that the Bishop had a fair at this place, which was reckoned sixteen *leucas* from the palace at Norwich." — *Beauties of England and Wales*, vol. xi. p. 268.

Mrs. Unwin's death, p. 324. — The two following letters, written by Mr. Johnson on the day of Mrs. Unwin's decease, will be read with interest. For the first I am obliged to Mr. Donne, of Mattishall; for the latter, to Mr. Powley, of Langwathby.

TO MISS JOHNSON.

MY DEAR KATE,

E. D. Saturday Evening.

The dear old lady's long-expected release from a world of sufferings took place at one o'clock this afternoon.

Our dear blessed cousin, who is a perfect angel, I verily believe, took it as calmly as we could expect. He and I were with her at half past twelve, and we were sitting by the study fire, reading the latter part of Miss Burney's third volume of *Camilla*, when Mr. J. P. called me out.

About half past four he seemed to wish to see her, and I went with him. A bright ray of sensibility struck his poor breast, after he had stood looking at her about a minute, and he flung himself to the other side of the room, as from an object that it was too much for him to look at. It is the first time, since he was taken ill at Weston, that the *smallest shadow of feeling* has ever been perceived in him. But the dear soul looked so placid, and so different from what she did when he and I saw her at half past twelve, that I am quite happy to think he has seen her.

At first he fancied he saw her *stir*; but on a nearer inspection the features of ghastly death struck him so forcibly as to occasion his tearing himself away, as I mentioned above.

Before he saw her he said he was sure she was not *dead*, but would come to life again in the grave and undergo the horrors of suffocation, and all on his account — he is the occasion of all that she or any other creature upon the earth ever *did* or *can* suffer — only think of this idea in a mind like his!!

But, thank God, he is wonderfully calm now, and made me give him a glass of wine the moment he got down, and took two pinches of snuff, which he has not done since Monday.

Yours, ever affectionately and faithfully,
J. J.

TO THE REV. MR. POWLEY, DEWSBURY, NEAR LEEDS, YORKSHIRE.

MY DEAR SIR,

East Dereham, Dec. 17, 1796. Saturday.

At one o'clock this afternoon poor Mrs. Unwin expired without the smallest symptom of a painful dissolution. Miss Perowne, and Sally,

and a nurse who was called in last night, were all standing by her bedside at the moment when the awful change took place, and they all say they never witnessed so easy a death.

Poor Mr. Cowper and I had been in the room about half an hour before, and I was reading to him in the study at his own particular request, when Miss Perowne called me out to say that all was over.

I wrote to Mr. Newton yesterday, to inform him that his dear friend and sister in the gospel of our Lord was on the verge of the land of blessedness; and I flatter myself that he received my letter this morning before the dear soul died, and if he had, I am sure that he remembered us in his prayers at the throne of grace for a suitable effect upon the hearts of those who witnessed a believer's going to glory! I had no hope that you could receive the intelligence in time, or I should have made a similar request to you and yours.

I know not when I can have your letter, but I hope it will arrive as soon as possible, because it will be necessary to despatch a man and horse over to give orders about the burial, whether it be at Huntingdon or Ely.

Until your letter arrives, we know not how to proceed. Mrs. Powley will, I trust, commission you to inform the relations of Mrs. Unwin, time enough for them to be present at the funeral, if they choose it; and in order to make that possible, you must, my dear souls, fix upon the day yourselves before you write to them, because of the length of time that would be lost by writing backward and forward into Norfolk. You will therefore be so good as to decide upon the time and place of interment, without thinking at all about Miss Perowne and me; and the moment I have your letter, I will despatch a message to give directions about the grave, being previously instructed by your letter of the particular spot in the church, either of Ely or Huntingdon, the grave is to be in; i. e. by the side of what other grave; — for I am totally ignorant of the dear soul's departed relatives in either place; — and Mr. Cowper never heard her speak upon the subject in his life.

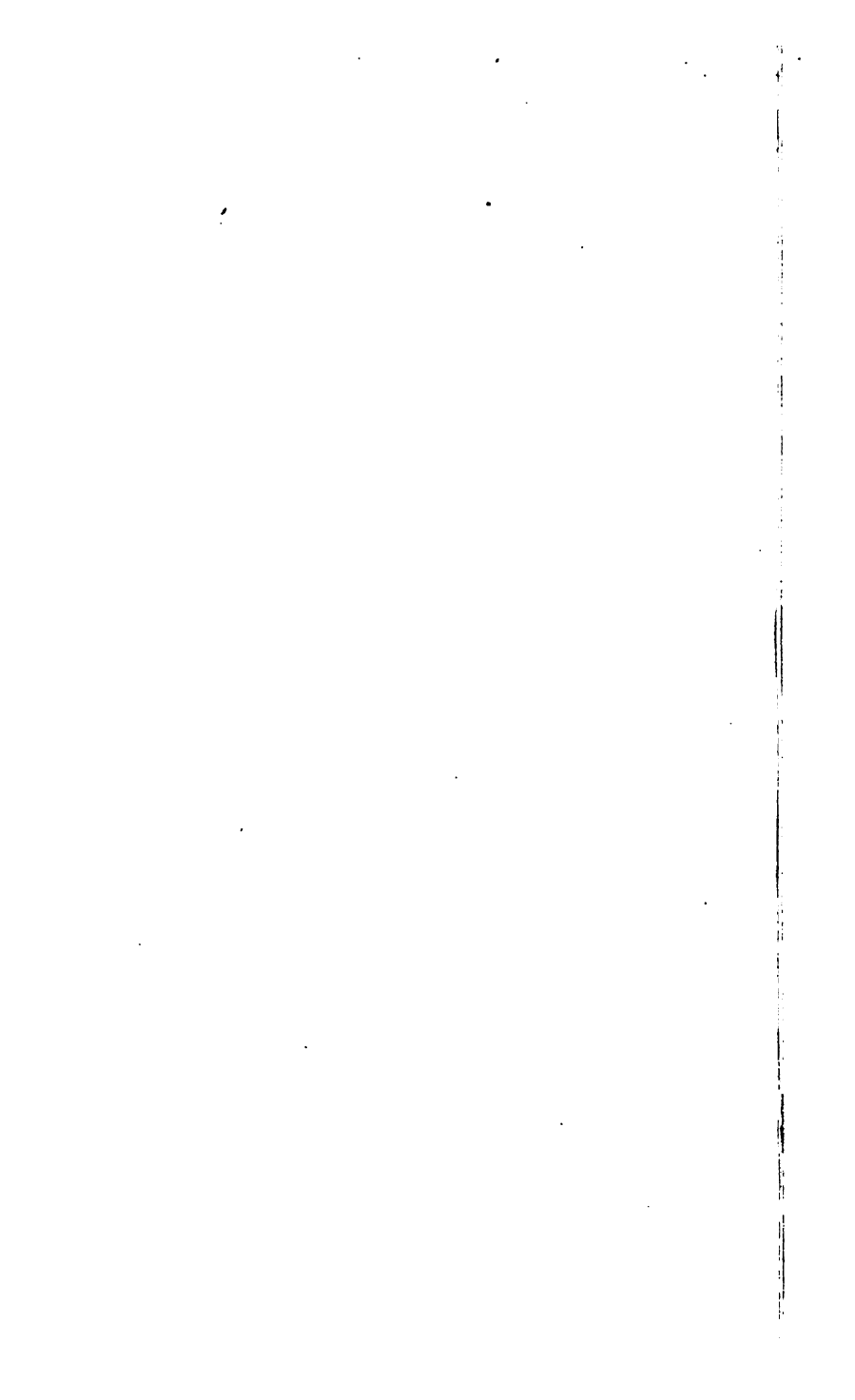
Poor Mr. Cowper heard the awful account as well as could be expected. God bless you both.

Yours, ever truly,

J. J.

P. S. As we are ignorant of poor Mrs. Unwin's age, Mrs. Powley will be so good as not to forget it when you write.

Cowper's monument, p. 343. — In an unpublished letter to Lady Hesketh, written while his third and supplementary volume of the *Life of Cowper* was in the press, Hayley says, "Be not alarmed at the awkward appearance of the drawing of the monument in the chapel, but admire my truly Christian spirit of forgiveness to pardon Johnny's architect, who has so murdered the elegance of my design. However, I love to bring good out of evil, and shall do so on this occasion, by introducing a second plate of the monument itself, without the chapel. Blake assures me the plaster model of the monument, now in Flaxman's study, is universally admired for its elegant simplicity."





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